



## Take the Punch Out of High-Protein Diets

If you're like many American adults, you're on a diet right now - and odds are it's some form of a high-protein diet. Do the results that these diets promise sound too good to be true? Trust your instincts if the answer is yes. Many high-protein diet books lack sound research to support their claims, and the proponents of these books often have no nutrition expertise.

So why do some people swear by high-protein diets and actually shed a few pounds temporarily? The key word here is temporarily. High-protein diets work temporarily because caloric intake is limited to 800 to 1,200 calories a day - not enough to meet the average adult's nutrition needs. Because it's impossible to maintain such a restrictive diet over the long haul, high-protein diet groupies tend to slip back into poor eating habits.

Supporters of high-protein diets also claim - without any supporting scientific evidence - that carbohydrates increase muscle fatigue, decrease mental alertness, stimulate the appetite and are addictive. In reality, the opposite is true.

Scientific studies prove that carbohydrates are the body's primary fuel for activity and the only fuel for the brain. That's why the My Pyramid Food Guide System, recognized by nutrition authorities for its emphasis on a balanced eating plan, showcases carbohydrate-rich grain foods as essential. Complex carbohydrates, such as bread, pasta, cereal and tortillas, help jump-start your metabolism and allow your body to burn calories more efficiently. When this happens, some people may become hungry between meals and mistakenly think they're having carbohydrate cravings. In fact, because the body is burning its fuel more efficiently, it may be necessary to eat five or six smaller meals throughout the day rather than three big meals to keep stoking your fire.

If high-protein diets are not the solution to weight loss, then where should you turn? The answer is to go back to the simple, three-step plan that has stood the test of time. Nutrition experts agree that to maintain a healthy weight over the long term, you should:

- Decrease total calorie consumption. Choose lower-fat versions of your favorite meals and eat only until you don't feel hungry - not until you feel full.
- Increase the calories you burn through physical activity. Spend 30 minutes a day taking the stairs, walking or integrating other physical activity.
- Adopt a balanced, low-fat, high-carbohydrate eating plan based on My Pyramid. Eat adequate amounts of grains, fruits, and vegetables supplemented with lean meat and low-fat dairy

### Carb Addicts' Follow Up: Too Good to be True?

Once again, promises of miracles and quick fixes to lose weight get front and center attention - even on daytime talk shows. No wonder consumers are fed up and most diet books end up in the trash. If you're one of the 58 million who wants to lose weight, you might be ready to try just about anything. But, before you enter The Zone, pursue Protein Power or consider labeling yourself a "Carbohydrate Addict" - like Oprah Winfrey and her 57 audience members did last fall - take a closer look at the science behind the claims.

In October 1999, Oprah and members of her audience did on a diet that had become all the rage - the Carbohydrate Addicts' LifeSpan Program. Although many of the audience members lost considerable weight, were the results too good to be true? If your gut says "yes," you're right. Many high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets lack sound research to support their claims, and the proponents of these nutrition books often have little nutrition expertise. Furthermore, the diets don't work in the long haul and may do more damage than good. Even more unfortunate, Oprah let the diet book authors appear on her show unopposed, without any representation of sound nutrition principles.

There is no scientific evidence to show that carbohydrates stimulate appetite, are addictive or lead to fat storage or weight gain for millions of people. What wasn't mentioned on the Oprah show was the research showing complex carbohydrates, such as bread, pasta, cereal and tortillas, help jump-start your metabolism and allow your body to burn calories more efficiently. When this happens, some people may become hungry between meals and mistakenly think they're having carbohydrate cravings. In fact, the body is burning its fuel more efficiently; therefore, it may be necessary to eat five or six smaller meals throughout the day, rather than three big meals, to keep stoking your fire. Your best bet is to follow My Pyramid, recognized by nutrition and medical experts, which showcases carbohydrate-rich grain foods and fruits and vegetables as the primary basis of all meal.

Overall, if you want to lose weight - and keep it off - here's the key: eat fewer calories, from a variety of foods, than you burn. Sorry, nothing sexy here. If you like potato chips have a few, not an entire bag. Have chips once in awhile, not every day. If you want pasta with pesto, go ahead; just go lightly on the sauce. It is the limitation of food choices with fad diets that is unrealistic - and in the end makes eating less enjoyable.