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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

The Truth About High Carbohydrate Diets

A high-carbohydrate diet makes you fat and hurts your athletic performance. Sounds hard to believe? It is, yet it's the premise of several carbohydrate-bashing diet books currently on the market.

These books (*Enter the Zone*, *Protein Power*, and *Fit for Life*) all feature diets that supposedly hold the key to lifetime thinness. Their shared theme is that everyone should eat a high-protein diet, instead of the high-carbohydrate diet recommended by most health professionals. Some books even claim that a high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet prevents and treats heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and depression, and in the process, helps us reach peak physical and mental performance. The following are three points you should understand about low carbohydrate/high protein diets:

Firstly, carbohydrate-bashing diet books claim that carbohydrates are bad because they raise blood sugar level and cause the release of "insulin"-a supposedly evil hormone that makes your body create and store more fat causing you to gain weight. It is important you know that carbohydrates and insulin do not make you fat! Insulin isn't a harmful hormone. It's essential for the transfer of glucose (blood sugar) from the bloodstream to the body's cells, where it is used as fuel for all of your activities. What matters in weight loss is not carbohydrates and insulin, but "calories". Getting a high percentage of your calories from carbohydrate doesn't make you fat, because weight depends only on how many calories you consume in a day compared to how many you burn off.

Secondly, high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets are not magic regimens-they're just very low-calorie. You will lose weight on these diets because of the severe caloric restriction, not because of what is supposedly happening to insulin levels. You'll eventually lose something else, too: your performance and well-being. You need to eat enough calories and carbohydrate to maintain your muscle stores of glycogen -your body's favoured fuel for exercise. Although you may feel a positive effect from losing the excess weight, following a low-calorie, low-carbohydrate diet will only put your body in a physiological state of near starvation.

Thirdly, high-protein, low-carbohydrate diets do not increase your ability to burn fat. No diet will help you gain better access to your body's fat stores during exercise. Carbohydrate, not fat, is the primary fuel your body needs and uses when performing your daily activities or exercising. Fat only becomes available for fuel after about 20 minutes of exercise, and most people don't work out long or hard enough to directly burn significant amounts of fat during a workout. But regular exercise can burn more overall calories than you consume, which promotes a gradual body fat loss over the long haul. Further, aerobic exercise raises the level of several hormones that promote greater fat use. Therefore, the best way to crank up your body's fat-burning ability is to keep working out.

In conclusion, I encourage my patients to eat a balanced diet, and this may even include cutting back on excess carbohydrates. However, the truth is that if you want to lose weight, you have to burn more calories than you consume each and every day. Regardless of what type of diet you follow, having a net loss of calories at the end of each day is the only way to shed those pounds.