

## **Atkins Diet**

Summary and review of diet by Elizabeth Wurdock, R.D.-eligible  
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### *What the Authors Claim:*

The Atkins diet is based on the premise that people eat too many carbohydrates and this leads them to be overweight. There is only part truth to the preceding statement; if energy intake (rather than just carbohydrate intake) is more than energy expenditure you may become overweight. In actuality, anytime you eat more calories than you burn, whether they be carbohydrate, protein, or fat, you will gain weight. Atkins idea is that we can only burn fat once the carbohydrate is used up. In order to preserve body tissue (protein), carbohydrate is initially the major means of energy for the body. Once the stored carbohydrate is used up, we can then begin to break down the fat. The idea is that our bodies burn carbohydrate first, and then can begin burning fat. By considerably reducing the carbohydrate content in the diet and replacing it with protein and fat, Atkins claims that we can begin burning fat more efficiently. The truth is that anytime calories are restricted or decreased you will lose weight.

### *Why it works:*

When someone starts a low carbohydrate, high protein diet like the Atkins diet there is an initial amount of rapid weight loss seen. This loss comes from the liver glycogen stores becoming depleted to help maintain blood glucose levels. With every gram of glycogen lost, 3 grams of water leave the body. The initial water loss can be significant, they are in fact losing weight, but it is mostly from water. Muscle glycogen will also considerably decrease. When the dieter loses weight soon after starting the diet it makes it easier to stick with because they see the results quick. After the initial water weight loss, more weight will continue to come off because of the cut in the total amount of energy intake, not the type of food eaten. The body enters a state of ketosis or breaking down of fat in place of glucose. Many tissues such as the brain are glucose dependent and rely on glucose for energy; ketones can be used but are not the preferred energy choice of these tissues. Typical carbohydrate intake, on the Atkins diet, is as low as 40g per day. The National Academy of Sciences' (NAS) Food and Nutrition Board

recommends no less than 120 grams of carbohydrate per day for optimal health and brain to function (Hall). There is no doubt that weight loss will be seen, but experts agree that the amount of calories consumed is more important than the type.

### *The plan itself:*

#### Phase 1- Induction

The Atkins diet includes 4 phases. In the first phase, called induction, your body goes into the state of ketosis and begins to burn fat for energy this typically lasts up to 14 days. Ketosis is when our bodies breakdown fat to replace glucose as a fuel source. Glucose is the energy source preferred by the body and specifically the brain. The carbohydrate intake during the induction phase is limited to 20g of carbohydrate per day that comes from a list of acceptable foods. You are not allowed to eat anything that isn't on the acceptable foods list.

#### Phase 2- Ongoing weight loss

During phase 2, ongoing weight loss, you increase your intake of carbohydrates by 5 grams. The amount of carbohydrate on the Atkins diet is counted as "net carbs" which deducts grams of fiber, glycerine and sugar alcohols from the total carbohydrate. Critical carbohydrate level for losing (CCLL) is part of the second phase in which you determine how many carbohydrates you can eat and remain in a state of ketosis. This can be found by ketone testing strips that test the urine for ketones.

#### Phase 3- pre maintenance

You can enter this phase of the diet when no more than 10 pounds need to be lost. The critical carbohydrate level for maintenance (CCLM) is used in the third phase. The CCLM is maximum the number of daily grams of carbohydrate intake above which weight is gained.

#### Phase 4- Lifetime maintenance

The last phase of the Atkins diets restricts carbohydrate content to maintain weight at a certain level, reached in previous phases.

#### *What the experts say about Atkins:*

Although most experts will admit that weight loss is seen with the Atkins diet, the questions of long-term safety and efficacy remain. Many large health orientated associations still agree and support use of diets that include fruit, vegetables, whole grain, and low fat dairy products for means of overall optimal health. The Atkins diet tends to be low in fruit, vegetables and whole grains. It is recommended that people on this diet take vitamins to supplement their diet; however there will still be many missing benefits, such as a reduced risk of disease. Phytochemicals, fiber and other nutrients will still be low or nonexistent in the diet. Phytochemicals are ingredients that occur naturally in fruits, vegetables, and grains, that may have protective benefits against cancer and other diseases. When considering starting a diet such as this, as with any diet, it is important to consult your physician.