



Beginners Guide to the Atkins Diet

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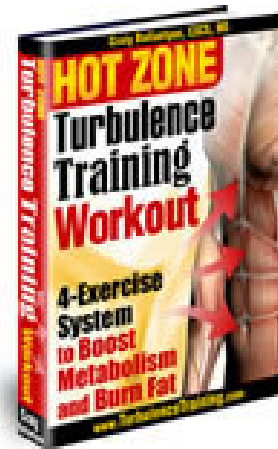
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Introduction

The Atkins diet is not a new phenomenon. The diet first appeared in the late 1970s and has grown popularity in recent years in response to the low-fat diet craze. As dieters had trouble with low-fat plans, they searched for a new solution and Dr. Atkins' New Diet Revolution book found a new audience.

A lot of people have jumped on the Atkins bandwagon and there has been a lot of hype as a result. But what are the basic principles of the Atkins diet?

The Atkins diet is based on a theory of why we get fat. According to Dr. Atkins, the over-consumption of carbohydrates and simple sugars leads to weight gain. The way your body processes the carbohydrates you eat have more to do with your waistline than the amount of fat or calories that you consume. In his book, Atkins outlines a phenomenon called "insulin resistance." He theorizes that many overweight people have cells that do not work correctly.

When you eat excess carbohydrates and sugar, your body notices that sugar levels are elevated. Insulin is released from the pancreas in order to store sugar as glycogen in the liver and muscle cells for extra energy later on. However, your body can only store so much glycogen at once. As soon as your body reaches its limit for glycogen storage, the excess carbohydrates are stored as fat. This happens to everyone who eats too many carbohydrates.

However, insulin resistant individuals have an even harder time of using and storing excess carbohydrates. The more insulin that your body is exposed to, the more resistant it becomes. Overtime, the pancreas releases more insulin and cells become insulin resistant. The cells are trying to protect themselves from the toxic effects of high insulin. They create less glycogen and more fat.

As a result, insulin resistant individuals gain extra weight. The carbohydrates get converted into fat instead of energy. Other side effects include fatigue, brain "fog" (the inability to focus, poor memory, loss of creativity), low blood sugar (which can lead to hypoglycemia), intestinal bloating, sleepiness, depression and increased blood sugar. There is much more than weight at stake when you are insulin resistant.

The remedy for people who are insulin resistant is a diet restricted in carbohydrates. The crux of the Atkins diet is a limitation of carbohydrates in all of its forms. The foods restricted on the Atkins plan include simple sugars (like cookies, sodas and sweets) and complex carbohydrates (like bread, rice and grains). Even carbohydrates that are considered healthy, such as oatmeal, brown rice and whole wheat bread, are restricted on the program.

The diet has you restrict your carbohydrate intake to less than 40 grams a day. This will put your body in a state of ketosis. While in ketosis, your body will burn fat as fuel. According to Dr. Atkins' research, the ketosis state will also affect

insulin production and it will prevent more fat from being formed. Your body will begin using your stored fat as an efficient form of fuel, and you'll lose weight. Another benefit of the Atkins plan is that ketosis will end your cravings for carbohydrates. If you've been living on a carb-heavy diet, you may have found that you simply cannot get enough carbohydrates. With carbohydrate restriction and ketosis comes a reduction in carbohydrate cravings. People who have been on the Atkins diet for some time report that they do not crave carbohydrates as they once did.

Although the initial phases of the Atkins diet are rather strict, the program teaches you to restore balance to your diet in the long run. People who use the diet slowly reintroduce minimal amounts of carbohydrate into their eating until they find a comfortable balance between their health and carbohydrate use.

The basic principles of the Atkins diet have been adapted to many other low-carb diet plans. However, Atkins popularity still remains strong as one of the most effective low-carbohydrate solutions for those who are insulin resistant.

Is Atkins Right For You

The Atkins diet is very popular, but is it right for you? Before you start down the low carb road, you should take some time to decide whether low carb is the right way for you to lose weight. Just because it has been effective for others doesn't mean it will be right for you. No specific diet works for everyone, and you may even find that a type of low carb diet that works better for you than another. There are many things to consider before you start the Atkins diet.

First, evaluate your past dieting history. If you've been trying to lose weight for a long period of time, you've no doubt tried a wide variety of diets. Take note of the different diets you've tried over the years. Write down the basics of each diet, what worked and what didn't. Also, write down why you didn't stay on the particular diet. Evaluate your experience with high carbohydrate diets. These types of diets include most low-fat and calorie controlled diets. How did you feel while on these types of diets? Were you hungry, obsessed with food or experiencing negative reactions? Or did you feel full of energy and generally good?

If you've had experience with low carb diets, write that down as well. Past the negative effects of the first week, how did eating low carb make you feel? Why did you stop using the low carb diet?

The answers to these questions will help you decide whether Atkins is right for you or not. If you've had good experiences with low-fat diets and bad experiences with other low carb diets, then Atkins is probably not for you. If other low-carb diets have worked but not without difficulty, then you may have been on the wrong type of low-carb diet and Atkins might work better. If you've had bad experiences with both types of diets, then you may have better success with a modified Atkins diet.

Your food and eating behaviors can also give you a clue to whether or not Atkins is a good choice for your weight loss efforts. Carb sensitivities are indicated by a certain set of behaviors. You may be carb sensitive if you feel like eating right after you've finished a meal. You will also feel strong urges to eat throughout the day. You may feel dizzy, fuzzyheaded and fatigued without getting a boost from sugar or another carbohydrate. Carb sensitivity is also shown when you feel sluggish after eating. This occurs especially after you eat a meal rich in sugars and carbohydrates. If you experience these symptoms frequently, you may have carb sensitivities. Try paying close attention to how carbohydrates affect you and if you continue to experience these symptoms, try doing a low carb diet.

Your success on the Atkins diet can also be determined by your medical and family history. If you have any pre-diabetic symptoms, or diabetes itself, a reduced carb diet like Atkins may be right for you. Significant weight gain can also be helped by the Atkins diet. Normally, the more overweight you are, the

more likely you are to have high blood pressure, high triglycerides and high blood glucose.

If any member of your family has diabetes or is significantly overweight, this can also put you at risk for these conditions. Your tendency toward these conditions on a genetic level can mark a necessity for a low carbohydrate diet like Atkins. The Atkins plan has been shown to improve weight and control blood sugar issues. If these are problems in your family history, then you may want to consider the Atkins diet.

There are a lot of good reasons to try the Atkins diet. Whether you have responded well to other low carb diets in the past or you have a medical history that warrants a controlled carbohydrate diet, the Atkins diet can meet your needs.

Pros and Cons Of The Atkins Diet

The Atkins diet is one of the most popular low carbohydrate diets on the market today. Its popularity has sparked dozens of look-a-like diets who center on the same principles of high-protein, low-carbohydrate eating. There are a lot of fish in the sea when it comes to choosing a low-carbohydrate plan.

Studies have shown that low-carbohydrate eating has many benefits. There have been scientific results that low-carbohydrate diets like Atkins do create significant weight loss without having to restrict calories. People who use the Atkins diet have also reported this. There are studies that show that low-carb eating improves triglycerides, reduces blood glucose for diabetics and pre-diabetics and increases good cholesterol (HDL). Low-carbohydrate dieting has been scientifically proven to improve insulin sensitivity, decrease blood pressure and lower blood insulin levels. When compared with low-fat diets, low-carb dieters lose less muscle mass.

Although not scientifically proven, there are many common benefits reported by Atkins dieters and other low-carb dieters. These include an increase in energy, a reduced craving for sweets, better concentration, improved mood and an lessening of depression type symptoms.

However, there are also some benefits that are specific to the Atkins diet. If you have been a low fat dieter in previous years, you'll enjoy eating all of those "forbidden foods" that you once had to go without. Steak, butter and cream are a regular part of Atkins dieters' meals. There is a certain pleasure that goes along with eating foods that were once off limits. Atkins dieters are encouraged to eat their full of rich meats, cheeses and fats and oils.

Atkins is also simple to use, compared with some other low-carb diets on the market. There are some basic food carbohydrate counts that you'll need to learn, but after that, you are free to eat from the acceptable food lists.

Dr. Atkins also emphasized finding your own personal carbohydrate level. Different people have different levels of carbohydrate tolerance. While some gain weight on just 90 carbohydrate grams a day, others can live comfortably at 120 carbohydrate grams. During the ongoing weight loss phase and pre-maintenance phase of the diet, you will learn your personal carbohydrate count that will help determine your carbohydrate goal for life.

The popularity of Atkins is a double-edged sword for dieters. There is a lot of information available on the diet, which makes it easy to find resources and support. There have been many, many Atkins books written and there are endless amounts of websites that offer tips and group support. However, everyone has heard of Atkins and probably has an opinion on it. There are some big misconceptions out there about the nature of the diet, and you'll no doubt have to defend your new way of eating from time to time.

There are some other minimal downsides to using the Atkins program. You do need to count carbohydrates in everything you eat to make sure that you are staying within your personal carbohydrate range. There is also the issue of Induction, the most hotly debated aspect of the plan. Induction can be difficult to get through if you've had a diet that centers on carbs and sugar. Also, many people try Induction and mistakenly believe that this is the way that the whole diet is going to be. They end up quitting before they get into the actual Atkins plan.

Sometimes, although it is not common, people will experience a carb crash on the 3rd to 5th day of the diet. This reaction is a result of their body finally experiencing ketosis, or running on fat instead of carbohydrates. The effects are transient, but many people have sworn off low-carb diets entirely because of this happenstance.

Overall, with the minor drawbacks considered, Atkins is one of the most popular low-carb diets for a reason. It works. Thousands of people have had success with the Atkins approach to the low-carb way of living.

Atkins and Appetite Suppression

One of the most common, and surprising, effects of following the Atkins diet is appetite suppression. Many followers of the plan report that the between meal hunger pangs they used to experience fade away very quickly. This makes it easier to stay on the diet and continue to lose weight. While other diets have their followers starving between meals, the Atkins diet offers relief from constant hunger. The Atkins diet, with its specific combination of foods and ingredients, has powerful appetite suppressing effects.

The first key component is the amount of protein in the Atkins diet. Protein, more so than carbohydrates, has the power to satiate hunger. If you've ever eaten a carb heavy meal and then felt hungry afterward, you know that carbohydrates don't have much staying power. Protein, when combined with a small amount of healthy fats, can keep you feeling full for long periods of time.

One of the most powerful appetite suppressing foods on the Atkins diet are eggs. Eggs are a great form of quick and easy protein. A recent study showed that eating eggs for breakfast would actually stave off hunger pangs through the rest of the day. The research concerned two groups of women. One group ate eggs for breakfast and the other had a breakfast of bagels and cream cheese. The calorie count for both breakfasts was exactly the same. The subjects kept track of what they ate the rest of the day and answered questions about their levels of hunger and satisfaction throughout the day. The results showed that the women who ate the eggs for breakfast felt more satisfied throughout the entire day. They ate less at each meal than the women who were in the bagel group.

Eggs contain about 6 grams of protein each. This helps to even out blood sugar and produces a feeling of satisfaction. Both of these factors help to curb cravings. Egg yolks also contain lutein and xanthophyll. These nutrients have been shown to have incredible effects on eye health. So it's important to eat the whole egg, and not just the white. Eggs contain choline that is important in brain functioning and memory. These nutrients are just an added benefit to the appetite suppressing qualities.

Broccoli and cauliflower, two of the acceptable vegetables on the Atkins program, also have appetite-suppressing effects. These vegetables are very bulky and they help make your stomach feel full. When your stomach feels full, it will actually create a chemical response in your body. Your body will reduce its appetite because it believes that your stomach is full of high calorie foods. This will happen regardless of what is in your stomach. You can achieve the same results with water and psyllium husk fiber. Both broccoli and cauliflower provide bulk in your diet and are essential vegetables on the Atkins plan.

The Atkins diet focuses on eating small protein balanced meals a few times per day. This will help keep your blood sugar stabilized and avoid carbohydrate cravings. With high carbohydrate diets, you are riding the wave of carbohydrate

highs. After you eat, you feel great and full. Then a few hours later, you come crashing down and are hungrier than you were previous to eating the carbohydrate. This cycle continues and, over time, you will eat more and gain weight. The protein, fat and vegetable meals of the Atkins plan put your blood sugar back in balance. They provide just enough of each type of food, with a proper amount of carbohydrates (from the vegetables). The vegetables provide quick carbohydrate energy, and the protein gives the meal staying power. This combination helps suppress your appetite.

The Atkins diet is actually a craving control diet that can help suppress your appetite. If you've had a problem with carbohydrate cravings before, this new way of eating will help control those cravings. The more you eat on the plan, the better your cravings will be controlled and the easier it will be to follow the diet.

Planning for Atkins

When it comes to the Atkins diet, your success will lie in your planning. Making sure you have the proper foods on hand when you begin your diet will go a long way toward your ongoing weight loss. There are many suggestions for Atkins diet meals in the Atkins books, and there are plenty of resources online for Atkins and low-carb recipes.

Planning your meals and snacks will be an important part of your life when you are on this diet. That advice really goes for any diet. When you eat whatever you like, you gain weight. Your current weight and health problems are a direct result of letting your eating habits go unchecked for so long.

As with all diet plans, becoming used to the Atkins way of eating is going to take some time and adjustment. The standard American diet relies heavily on carbohydrates and other restricted foods. Many people grew up on carbohydrate heavy favorites like spaghetti and meatballs, meat and potatoes and pasta casserole. It is going to take some effort and patience to get used to eating in an entirely new way.

There are two different approaches you can take in adjusting your diet. You can find replacements for your favorite foods with “mock” carbohydrates. For example, lasagna made with eggplant or zucchini instead of pasta is much more carb-friendly than the regular variety. Spaghetti squash noodles make a good substitute for spaghetti noodles. There are also many low-carb or carb-free replacements for bread, pasta and sugar products.

The second approach is to find out how to make new recipes that center around meats and other low-carb foods. There are a wide variety of meats that are acceptable on the Atkins plan. If you are used to just eating ground beef or chicken on a weekly basis, you’ll be surprised by the variety of meats that are out there. Try incorporating pork, lamb and ham into your weekly routine. You can also experiment with game fowl like Cornish hen, quail and pheasant. If you’ve never been a fan of fish, try a different variety. Some people who don’t like trout find they have a love of salmon or another fish. Don’t forget shellfish like mussels, clams and shrimp. These foods are all acceptable and can add variety to your diet.

Make sure to have some easy to prepare foods on hand for snacks and quick meals. For example, thin sliced cucumbers, radishes and celery mixed with lemon mayonnaise makes a great low-carb meal or dinner salad. Fried peppers, mushrooms and garlic served on arugula with feta cheese is another good option.

Research and try out different low-carb recipes so you have a good base of knowledge of what to prepare for meals. The most important step you can take in losing weight is planning. Getting a good arsenal of easy to prepare meals will prevent you from hitting the drive through or going to a restaurant and breaking your diet.

If you have delicious food to look forward to everyday, you'll be less bored with your diet. Even during the restrictive induction phase, there are many food combinations that you can use. At first glance, the vegetable and meat options may seem restrictive. But this is only in comparison to what you have been used to eating. With a little planning and creativity, you can find something interesting to eat everyday.

Atkins Diet Foods

Atkins diet foods are easy to find and available everywhere. There are many varieties to choose from, whether you pick prepackaged low-carb diet foods or make your own meals. No matter how you want to do the Atkins plan, there is a solution out there for you.

You'll need to keep the Atkins food pyramid in mind when you make food choices. The Atkins pyramid looks much different than the USDA Food Guide Pyramid. The base of the pyramid consists of protein sources such as eggs, fish, beef, chicken and tofu. On a daily basis, your diet should consist primarily of these foods. The second tier has low glycemic vegetables like salad greens, broccoli, cauliflower, asparagus and spinach.

The third tier is made up of berries and avocado. Fruits should be used on an occasional basis after the initial stages of the Atkins diet. Vegetable and seed oils, cheese, dairy, nuts and legumes are used sparingly and in appropriate portions. While the FDA pyramid has oils and fats at the top peak, the Atkins pyramid places whole grain foods in this spot. Whole grain foods should be used very occasionally and don't make up the mainstay of the Atkins diet.

When you start the Atkins plan, you'll need to make sure you understand which foods are acceptable for your stage of the program. The Induction phase is the most restrictive, but it only lasts two weeks.

You owe it to your dieting success to stay within the acceptable foods list. One of the best ways to do this is to follow the Atkins menu plans that are printed within the New Diet Revolution book. There are also Atkins cookbooks and cookbooks that are geared toward other low carb diets that are helpful in formulating meal plans.

It's a helpful idea to use a cheat sheet of acceptable Atkins foods wherever you go. If you are out and about and hungry, the last thing you want to do is to try to think back in your memory to figure out what you can and cannot eat. Carrying a list of acceptable foods with you will make finding a snack or meal while out on the run easy. You can't always rely on "low carb" labels to tell you whether or not something is diet friendly. Ever since low carb became the new diet craze, manufacturers have been jumping on the bandwagon to attract Atkins dieters. They label items low carb to sell products and don't have your health in mind. Relying on foods from your own personal list is the best way to stay on the plan.

Another good resource for keeping track of the appropriate Atkins foods is an online diet program. There are several available. Some are free and some have a small monthly fee. The programs require you to register and then they provide you with personal weekly menu plans based on your needs and your carbohydrate gram level. There are normally printable weekly shopping lists that make picking up your Atkins diet foods from the grocery store easy and quick.

Atkins diet food is easy to find once you know what you are looking for. The books, food pyramid and online resources can help you make better food choices and stay on the diet for the long term.

Atkins Induction

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Atkins Induction Rules

The Induction phase of the Atkins diet is one of the most important stepping-stones to successful weight loss. In addition to the list of acceptable foods, there are a few rules that are important to follow during this period of the diet.

During Induction, you need to eat three regular-sized meals per day or four to five smaller meals. If you find yourself jittery and hungry between meals, try breaking down your meals into smaller portions and eat more frequently. In order to stave off carbohydrate cravings, you'll need to constantly keep your body running on the proteins and vegetables on the plan. Never skip meals and never go more than six waking hours without eating.

You can eat freely from the list of acceptable foods. Do not restrict your fats and proteins. Eat as much of them as you like. Remember, the Atkins diet is not a calorie-restricted diet. The only thing you need to worry about is your level of carbohydrate grams. Make sure to count your carbohydrate grams when you eat vegetables, cheese and beverages with Splenda. At least 12-15 grams of your allowed carbohydrates should be from your vegetable list. While it may be tempting to eat them all in cheese, vegetables are important to your digestive system (especially while on this diet).

Avoid all fruit, bread, pasta, grains and starchy vegetables (like cauliflower or squash) during this initial period. These foods will be slowly introduced throughout the course of the pre-maintenance phase. Although beans are high in protein, they also include carbohydrates and should be avoided during this phase. If you feel that you must have some grain products, you should limit yourself to high fiber low-carbohydrate products. However, this may slow down your weight loss process.

Anything that isn't on the acceptable food list is forbidden during the Induction phase. Don't be tempted to just have "one bite." Your one bite may turn into two, and then before you know it you'll end up ruining your diet.

Remember to adjust the quantity of acceptable foods to suit your appetite. At the beginning of the Induction phase, you may find yourself eating much, much more than you will toward the end of the phase. As your body breaks its addiction to sugar and carbohydrates, you will be less hungry throughout the day. When this starts to happen, make sure to eat only what you need. Eat until you are satisfied and not overly stuffed.

Always read the labels of packaged products, even if they claim they are "carb free." You may find that some products have hidden carbohydrates. The law allows manufacturers to round off to zero if a product has fewer than .5 grams of carbohydrates. Look at the list of ingredients for manufactured products to determine if there are hidden carbs. You'll also need to watch out for hidden carbohydrates when you eat out. There are small carbohydrate amounts in

gravies, sauces and salad dressings. The best bet is to eat your meat without sauce and eat your salad with olive oil and vinegar dressing.

Remember to drink 8 eight-ounce glasses of water, in addition to anything else you might drink. This will keep your body hydrated and help you avoid constipation. You'll also be able to flush out the by-products created by fat burning.

Keep all of these guidelines in mind when you start the induction phase and you'll be setting yourself up for long-term success with the Atkins diet.

Atkins OWL Phase

The second phase of the Atkins diet is called Ongoing Weight Loss or OWL. After the rapid weight loss of the 2-week Induction phase, you'll be slowing your weight loss down just a bit. You'll add in specific carbohydrates that will make your diet a little easier and your weight loss just a bit slower. However, you will continue to lose weight at a steady even pace with ease.

During the OWL phase you will boost your body's ability to burn fats. Although you'll be adding carbohydrates slowly, you'll still remain in the state of ketosis. You will continue to use your excess fat as fuel for your body, and the pounds and inches will continue to come off.

The OWL phase will also teach you to make better carbohydrate choices. The recipes and guidelines for OWL will increase your knowledge about nutritious food. You'll replace the poor carbohydrate choices that you relied on in the past with new and better choices.

You'll also learn how many carbohydrates you can consume and still lose weight. The process of the OWL phase is an experiment in what your specific body does with carbs. During the OWL phase, you'll gradually increase your daily carb intake from the 20-gram level that you used in induction. Each week you'll try adding another 5 grams of carbs and then take note of what happens. When weight loss slows too much, you'll know that you've exceeded your personal carb limit.

OWL also prepares you for your permanent weight management program (called maintenance). The habits and practices that you develop during OWL will go a long way toward your long-term success. Treat this period of your diet as training for the real "test" – your post diet life.

During the OWL phase, you'll still be getting most of your carbohydrates from vegetables (just as you do during Induction). It's important to continue to eat a wide variety of vegetables, as they are good for your overall health and good for maintaining intestinal health during the Atkins diet. You will be able to add more portions of vegetables, and then gradually be able to add nuts, seeds and even berries. However, the main focus of the diet will still be protein.

In a way, the Induction phase is easier than any of the other phases of Atkins. The strict plan always works and always produces weight loss. As you enter the OWL phases, you'll need to be more mindful of your carbohydrate count and keep better track of your weight. You'll have more choice and that may lead to more temptations, which could result in a stalling of your weight loss or even weight gain.

Counting carbohydrate grams is critical in your OWL success. If you don't count, you will end up consuming more carbohydrates than you should. However, there

are many tools available that can help you with counting. There are several handy, portable books that will tell you the number of grams of carbohydrates in certain foods. Over time, you'll know the "carb count" for your favorite foods instantly.

Counting carbs is also essential during the OWL phase because you are playing detective. You are investigating to find your personal carb count, the amount of carbohydrate grams that you can eat daily and still lose weight. During the first week of OWL, you'll move from 20 carbohydrate grams to 25. It is recommended that you add this in the form of more vegetables, like asparagus or cauliflower. You'll continue at the 25-gram level for a week, and then move up to 30 grams a day.

As you increase your carbohydrate gram level, watch your weight closely. If you experience too much of a slowdown, you know you've gone too high. You'll find your maximum carbohydrate gram level when you stop losing weight at all. When this happens, you'll know you've reached your limit. Once you discover your personal carb count, drop down below that number if you want to continue losing weight.

Atkins Pre Maintenance Phase

After experiencing the Induction and OWL phases of the Atkins diet, your next step is to enter the pre-maintenance phase. This phase will set you up for a lifetime of healthy and balanced eating and living. You should begin this phase as you come within 5 to 10 pounds of your target weight goal. Your weight loss will be slowed down even further but it is for a purpose. You want to learn the practices and habits that will determine your long-term success.

In the OWL phase, you will be adding carbohydrate grams to your daily count in the increment of 5 grams per week. During pre-maintenance you will increase that to 10 grams per week. As long as you are continuing to shed weight (no matter how slowly it is coming off) you will continue to add grams. Ideally, toward the end of the pre-maintenance phase you will be losing less than one pound per week.

According to the Atkins book, you should continue this phase until you get to your goal weight and can maintain it for a month. This process may take anywhere from 1 to 3 months. Your goal is to reach a state called “carbohydrate equilibrium.” This is your ideal carbohydrate intake and it will cause you to maintain your weight perfectly.

During pre-maintenance you’ll get to try a wider variety of foods. Make sure to introduce new foods slowly and increase your carbohydrate intake at a measured pace. Don’t add 20 or 30 carb grams a week. Measuring out the increases in increments of 10 will give you a better idea of your personal carbohydrate count. Knowing this number will help set you up for long term weight management.

Make sure to check with a carbohydrate counter resource book or a trusted website before you add a new food to your diet. Some examples of 10 carbohydrate gram foods include 1/3 of a cup of legumes, 1/2 an apple, 1/4 cup of potatoes and 1/2 cup of plain oatmeal. These foods can be included on a daily basis, and then increased the next week.

Pre-maintenance is not a perfect process. It takes a delicate balance of carbohydrate counting and exercise to slow weight loss yet still move it forward. You’ll need to pay even closer attention than you have before to make sure that your carb gram increase is not resulting in an increase in weight. There is a fine line between gaining, maintaining and losing, and during pre-maintenance you are trying to find out just exactly where that line is.

If you aren’t able to add carbohydrates without stalling your weight loss, you may have a high metabolic resistance. You will benefit from increasing your exercise regimen to get your metabolism burning at a higher level. For you, the pre-maintenance phase will resemble OWL more closely.

Some people do a variation on pre-maintenance that allows them to have a treat once a week. Instead of adding 10 grams per day, they allow themselves a 20 to 30-carbohydrate gram treat a few times a week. Examples of the treat could be a piece of a fruit or a serving of sweet potatoes. A glass of white wine or beer also qualifies for this treat. This is a fun way to reward yourself and still be on the plan.

Yet another way to do pre-maintenance is to average out your carbohydrate intake for the week. Since life is sometimes unpredictable, it can be helpful to have a bit of flexibility in your eating plan. For example, if your current carbohydrate level is at 70 grams, you can limit yourself to 50 grams one day. Then the next day, you can splurge a bit on a meal and have 90 grams for that day. However, only follow this method if it doesn't create carbohydrate cravings. Sometimes excess carb grams on one day can make you crave them even more the next day.

The pre-maintenance phase will give you the tools for long-term success. By learning to slowly increase your carbohydrate grams, you'll have a better hold on the amount of carbohydrates that is right for you.

Atkins Maintenance

The final phase of the Atkins diet plan is lifetime maintenance. This is the time to continue your new eating plan at a maintenance level and keep yourself at your goal weight. The habits you have created will now become a permanent way of life. During the third phase, pre-maintenance, you learned exactly how many carbohydrate grams your body can tolerate and still maintain your ideal weight. In this phase, you'll put this approach into practice and learn to live with your ideal carb count on a daily basis.

During lifetime maintenance you will continue to expand your food selections and eat more carbohydrate grams than you did previously. Depending on your specific metabolic needs, you can eat some of the foods that you enjoyed prior to starting your weight loss program. If you do choose to eat these foods, they must be moderated and used sparingly.

Keeping your daily carb count right around your ideal carb count is the easiest way to maintain your weight loss. Your weight may fluctuate by two or three pounds from time to time, but this is perfectly normal. This weight fluctuation is due to hormonal changes in your body.

During maintenance you'll also learn how to overcome your previous bad habits. Losing weight and keeping it off means dealing with real-world situations. You'll develop coping strategies for stress eating, emotional eating and holiday eating. You'll also develop plans for dealing with eating out in restaurants. The challenges during the maintenance phase are many, but they can be overcome.

It's all about preparation. When you've followed the Atkins diet plan for a long time, you've learned exactly how many carbohydrate grams you can handle. You've also learned what foods trigger carbohydrate cravings and which foods lead to binges. You've developed coping strategies over the course of your OWL and pre-maintenance phases that you will have to use in lifetime maintenance.

To prepare yourself for lifetime maintenance, make a promise to yourself never to go back to your previous weight. Make the commitment by donating all of your "fat" clothes. This way, if you do start to gain more than five pounds, you'll know that you have to buckle down and eat better. Also, write down in a journal or in a list format all of the benefits of being at your new, thinner size. Write about how much better you feel and how healthy you are. This will cement your new way of life into your mind and your heart.

Choose your lifetime maintenance weight goal range. This is a range of weight that is acceptable to you. For example, if your initial weight loss goal was to be 165 lbs, your lifetime maintenance goal will be 160 to 170 pounds. If your weight starts to creep up toward 170 pounds, then you know that you are being too lenient with your carbohydrate grams. Never let your weight vary more than 3 to 5 pounds in either direction.

Make a commitment to weigh yourself at least once a week. This once-a-week weigh in will give you a good idea of how you are doing on your maintenance program. Use that weekly weight as a guideline for your approach in eating for the following week.

In addition to these guidelines, make sure to continue an exercise program. Your metabolism depends entirely upon the amount of exercise that you are getting. Making the commitment to exercise goes hand in hand with the commitment to keep eating correctly.

By following these guidelines, you can make lifetime maintenance simple and easy.

Atkins and Ketosis

The basic principle of the Atkins diet is that a state of ketosis will help you burn your fat stores as energy. Many people, even those who are on low carbohydrate diets, don't quite understand ketosis and why it works.

Most diets are calorie-reduction diets. They help you lose weight, but some of the weight is from fat and some of it is from lean muscle tissue. While you may look smaller on the scale, your metabolism is actually slowing down. The more muscle you lose the slower your metabolism will be. This makes losing weight more difficult and gaining weight back even simpler.

The Atkins diet, on the other hand, is carbohydrate restrictive. It creates a state of ketosis in your body that burns only fat, and not muscle. The primary source of your energy for your body will be fat in the form of ketones. Your liver will convert fat into ketones and it cannot be converted back. It will be excreted naturally.

Ketones are actual a normally and efficient source of fuel for the human body. They are created in the liver from the fatty acids that result from the breakdown of body fat. These only appear when there is an absence of glucose and sugar. In the Atkins diet, you reduce the amount of glucose and sugar that is in the bloodstream. As a result, your body produces ketones for fuel. When your body is creating ketones it is called ketosis.

There is a common misconception that following a ketogenic diet like Atkins is dangerous. The truth is that being in ketosis is a completely naturally state. The human body creates ketones to use as fuel in the absence of glucose.

In the Atkins diet book, Dr. Atkins suggests using ketone-testing strips to determine your state of ketosis during dieting. These small plastic strips are held in the urine stream and contain a special chemically treated absorptive pad. This pad will change color if ketones are present in the urine. With the presence of ketones, the strip will change varying shades of pink to purple. There is a color scale on the label of the bottle that will help you determine your ketone levels.

Ketone strips are available in any pharmacy and can be found among the diabetic supplies. In some stores, they are kept behind the counter so you may have to ask for them. You won't need a prescription to buy them though. Once you open a package of ketosis strips they have a shelf life of 6 months. It may be helpful to mark the opening date on the box.

Ketone strips will let you know if you are progressing correctly on the Atkins diet. If you are following the Induction plan to the letter and aren't seeing purple, don't worry. Some people never show trace amounts of ketones or they may show just above the minimum line. As long as you are losing weight and inches then

you are successfully using ketones. Also, if you've just exercised a few hours before using the strips, you may not see purple.

Some dieters may mistakenly believe that a dark purple result on the testing strips means that they are losing weight faster. Actually, the darkest purple color is a sign of dehydration. It means that your urine is too concentrated and you need to drink water.

Ketones come from fat in the bloodstream, whether it is fat that you eat or fat that you burn. So if you eat a meal heavy in fat and then immediately use a testing strip, then you'll see a dark purple result. Use the strips as a guide, but don't get hung up on the color.

Reaching a state of ketosis is key to success on the Atkins diet and it is as simple as eliminating carbohydrates from the diet. Make sure to follow the eating plan correctly and use the ketone testing strips as needed.

Atkins Shopping Tips

When you start the Atkins diet, you are entering a new world of eating. And nowhere is that more apparent than at the supermarket. Suddenly, all of your stand-by foods like macaroni and cheese, pasta and bread are no longer on your shopping list. When you go shopping for the first few times you may feel like a fish out of water. However, with a bit of practice you'll feel just as comfortable as you were with your previous shopping lists.

Successful Atkins shopping starts before you reach the store. There are many resources for shopping lists online and in Atkins books. Before you head for the store, make a list of the week's recipes and then decide what you'll need to make each meal. Make sure to purchase low-carb snacks for in between meals.

Also, plan for modifications to the meals for other people in your home. You won't be able to make totally different meals for yourself and your family for the long term. The best approach is to use the main meat dish for your meal for the entire family and then a carbohydrate side dish for your family. For example, if you are eating meatloaf you can add half a potato for the other members of your family.

Once you've made your meal plan for the week, its time to hit the store. When you arrive, buy your protein items and produce first. This may sound very simple and like it won't make much difference, but it will. Once you've filled your cart with all of the acceptable foods, there won't be room for much more.

Consider buying your meat in bulk. This will save you lots of money if you know where to get family sized packages of meat. When you buy meat in large quantities, you can also cook it in bulk as well. Taking time a few days per week to cook meat makes it simple to follow the Atkins plan. You can cook your meat before hand and have it ready to go when you need it. You can purchase ground beef, chicken pieces, small steaks and even seafood in bulk.

Cheese, if you can tolerate it, can also be purchased in bulk. Many stores offer store-brand cheese in large bricks. You'll need to make sure to read the labels before you purchase any cheese. Make sure that when you eat cheese to eat some fiber (salad or raw veggies) as well. Having large blocks of your favorite cheeses on hand can make it easy to grab a quick snack between meals.

As you walk around the store, stick to the outer edges. The outer aisles have the freshest food. Think about your neighborhood grocery store. Most often the deli, the meat counter and the produce section are all along the sides of the store with the packaged items in the aisles. This is especially important if you are in the initial phases of the Atkins diet. You'll want to stay away from all packaged foods during induction, even if they are low carb packaged foods. Once you add more carbohydrate grams to your daily limit, you can start to experiment with low-carb packaged foods.

That leads to the next important tip – read the labels! Just because an item says it is low carb, it may have hidden sugars. Do your investigative work at the grocery store so you won't get home with products that cause you to gain weight. Shopping for the Atkins diet will take some time to get used to. You'll be navigating parts of the grocery store that you may not be familiar with. You'll also be purchasing items you've never cooked before. However, with planning and dedication low carb shopping will become easier. Just remember to make a list before you visit the store and stay toward the outer aisles of the grocery store. In no time, you'll be an experienced low carb shopper.

Atkins Cost Saving Tips

The Atkins diet has a lot of health benefits, but it is not exactly easy on the wallet. Fresh meats are some of the most expensive items in the grocery store and when you follow Atkins, you'll need to purchase a lot of them. However, there are simple steps that you can take to cut costs on this low-carb plan.

First of all, be creative in your meal planning. Remember that most diet books are written to entice readers to try new combinations of foods. The recipes within those books contain the most expensive ingredients. You don't have to cook like a professional chef in order to be able to experience the benefits of the Atkins diet. There are many simple recipes that you can make that are within the plan and cost much less than the ones shown in the diet books. If you modify the meal plans with the books, you can enjoy the low carb lifestyle on a budget.

One of the most important steps to take is to buy your meats in bulk. When you stock up on large packages of ground beef, chicken and fish you cut down on your protein costs. You can separate the large packages into small freezer bags and freeze them in meal-sized portions. Two to four chicken breasts in a bag are easy to defrost and make a good-sized meal. You can also cook ground beef in many different varieties and freeze the cooked portions. Try doing a portion of the meat with taco spices, another portion with hamburger spices and the third portion with Italian spices. That way you'll be able to use lots of hamburger meat and still have variety in your diet.

Also, look at less tender cuts of meat to trim costs in your grocery money. While fillet mignon may be tasty, it doesn't fit into every budget. Less tender cuts of beef and pork make excellent crock-pot meals, and using a slow cooker will help tenderize them.

Look to alternative protein sources like eggs and tofu. Both of these items pack a powerful protein punch for a fraction of the cost of meats. Nuts are a great protein source as well, but they can become expensive very quickly. Some recipes call for expensive macadamia nuts and cashews. Walnuts, peanuts and almonds contain just as much protein for a fraction of the cost.

Mixed vegetable salads will make a large portion of your daily Atkins meals. While it may be tempting to buy bagged salad that is already chopped, you are going to be paying \$2 to \$3 per bag. You can buy three heads of different types of lettuce for the same cost and make the equivalent of six bags of prepackaged salad. Also, consider investing in a salad spinner. This handy device will make homemade salads crispy and satisfying.

Be creative with your menus and use produce and meats that are on sale. If you've got a recipe that calls for chicken breasts and turkey happens to be on sale, go ahead and substitute this week. Make sure to carry an acceptable food list with

you the grocery store so you can tell whether a sale food is an okay substitution on the Atkins plan.

When you go to the store, you can also cut costs by limiting your purchase of low-carb packaged foods. These items are really expensive, and sometimes full of harmful chemicals. They may also contain hidden carbs which can stall your weight loss efforts. The Atkins plan can be effectively followed without using any of these products. Unless it's a special occasion, skip them all together.

Finally, its best to plan your meals and your shopping trips so you can buy your groceries in an effective manner. Going to the grocery store unprepared or, even worse, hungry can spell disaster for your budget. Plan each week's menu out ahead and time and then buy what you need to make those meals.

Atkins and Unprocessed Foods

When you first start on the Atkins program, you may be tempted to take advantage of many of the low carbohydrate products on the market today. There are a wide variety of packaged items that are specifically manufactured to be low-carb. These include low-carb snacks, low-carb baking products and low-carb substitutes (like pasta or bread). While it may be enticing to fill your shopping cart with all of these goodies, it's best for your diet and for your health to use them sparingly.

One of the key things to remember about the Atkins diet is its focus on raw, unprocessed foods. The center of diet, as shown by the Atkins diet food pyramid, is fresh vegetables and fresh meats. Added into the mix are natural cheeses, a selection of fruits and, eventually, whole unprocessed grains. There aren't any packaged meats, canned vegetables or instant anything.

There is a reason that the Atkins food pyramid shows these foods in their raw states. There are great health benefits in minimally processed foods. Raw, whole foods retain more vitamins and nutrients than foods that have been through chemical and industrial processing. Manufactured foods are more likely to be tainted with chemical additives that can cause a whole host of problems.

Raw, fresh food ingredients provide the best basis for a healthy diet. Many dieters rely on foods that are technically allowed on the plan, but not good for health. One example is bacon. Many people on the Atkins diet consume lots of bacon. In fact, many use it as a daily part of their protein foods. However, bacon contains high amounts of sodium nitrite, an ingredient that is known to cause cancer. The more bacon they eat, the more they expose themselves to this chemical and many others.

The Atkins pyramid, and the Atkins diet books, recommends unprocessed, unrefined and non-manufactured foods for a reason. If people follow these recommendations, they will lose weight and experience health transformations. By eating fresh and natural foods you'll be providing your body with the nutrients that you need to have optimum health.

Back to those packaged and processed low-carb foods. Technically, they are part of the low-carb program. They can be used in moderation as substitutes for your favorite carbohydrate heavy foods. In a pinch, low-carb bread and baked goods can help you get over cravings and add variety to your Atkins diet plan. However, one look at the labels of these products shows how chemically processed these items can be.

It is recommended that you use these products sparingly. In some individuals, low-carb packaged items cause carbohydrate cravings. This can make staying on the diet even more difficult. If you find that low-carb processed foods make you want to binge on carb-heavy foods, then it's best that you stay away from these

products. These products may also have hidden carb counts that will increase your daily carbohydrate level without you realizing it.

If you are experiencing a stall in your weight loss on the Atkins plan, re-evaluate your commitment to unprocessed and unrefined foods. If you've been eating too many low-carb processed foods, you may be consuming hidden carbs and eating more than necessary. Try eliminating these products and refocusing your diet on unprocessed and unrefined foods, like those seen on the Atkins diet pyramid. When you go grocery shopping, spend time along the outer rim of the store where the fresh, unprocessed foods are. This will help you avoid the temptation of packaged foods that can lead your diet astray.

You may need to rely on packaged meats, vegetables and fruits from time to time. We lead busy lives and convenience foods are part of life. It's understandable that you may need to use some canned soup, bacon or canned vegetables in your daily life. However, make an effort to concentrate your dietary efforts on a wide variety of fresh, unprocessed foods. Your health and weight loss efforts will be greatly rewarded.

Carbohydrate Cravings And the Atkins Diet

Carbohydrate cravings are difficult to deal with, especially when you are trying to maintain a low carbohydrate way of life. However, carbohydrate cravings are not just a matter of will power. As Dr. Atkins points out in his book, carbohydrates produce a flood of insulin and a rise in blood sugar. There is indeed a physical trigger for carbohydrate cravings, and it is one of the reasons that it is so easy to develop a high-carbohydrate, low protein way of eating.

There are many signs of physical carbohydrate cravings. You will experience a compelling hunger for carbohydrate rich foods. Overtime, you will develop a growing need for starches, snack foods and sweets. Additionally, you may experience cravings and weight gain after using some of the carbohydrate act-a-likes such as sugar substitutes and alcohol.

High carbohydrate foods are everywhere, which makes the cravings even harder to overcome. Eating the high-sugar, refined starch foods will feed your cravings and create more, much like a drug habit. In fact, high levels of carbohydrates produce high levels of the brain chemical serotonin, which is the chemical found in Prozac and other anti-depressants. So eating high levels of carbohydrates is self-medicating. People with low levels of serotonin are prone to using carbohydrates like a drug.

Tension and stress can also lead to overeating carbohydrate-laden foods. When we are tense, the adrenal gland creates more cortisol. Cortisol is a hormone that stimulates production of a brain chemical that causes carbohydrate cravings. It also stimulates insulin, which leads to blood sugar dips and more fat storage.

Considering all of these factors, it may seem impossible to live on a low-carbohydrate diet. However, following the Atkins plan is one of the best ways to break the cycle of carbohydrate addiction and take back your life and your health. The Atkins plan helps you take control of your cravings and rid yourself of years of damage caused by eating too many carbohydrates.

While on the Atkins diet, you may experience some carbohydrate cravings from time to time, especially during the initial phases of the diet. However, these will lessen as your body becomes more used to eating a protein-centered diet. In order to keep your cravings in check, eat small meals or snacks that contain protein every few hours. This will keep your blood sugars stable and avoid the "crash" you feel when you go hungry. Skipping meals will cause drops in blood sugar and leave you craving sweets.

Protein and fat, which are the focus of the Atkins plan, will give your body extended energy. Make sure you are getting enough levels of the essential fats. Sometimes an Omega 3 fish oil supplement will help stave off carbohydrate cravings.

Cravings for foods can sometimes be caused by dehydration. It's a good rule of thumb to drink a glass of water before reaching for any type of snack. Sometimes thirst can mask itself as hunger. When your body is properly hydrated, it will run more efficiently and you will see a decrease in cravings.

Recognize that there is a physical addiction to carbohydrates that will need to be broken. Don't worry if you feel overwhelmed with cravings for carbs after the first few days on the plan. This is normal. Your body is used to running on a diet full of sugar and carbohydrates. It will take some time to adjust to this new way of eating. Normally, these feelings don't last more than the two-week induction period. Stay committed to this new way of eating and you will see the benefits quickly.

Carbohydrate Substitutes for the Atkins Diet

Cutting down on carbohydrates with the Atkins diet is easy when you see the wide variety of proteins and vegetables that are on the acceptable foods list. However, it does take some time and adjustment to get used to this new way of eating. A lot of the American diet centers around complex carbohydrate foods like breads and pastas. Snack foods are full of sugars and refined carbohydrates. This new way of eating will challenge your old habits. However, there are many carbohydrate substitutes that can fill in the gap.

Some of the most popular replacement items are sugar substitutes. These can be good or bad depending on how you react to them. Each person has a different reaction to artificial sweeteners like aspartame and Splenda. They can be helpful in baking low-carbohydrate treats and making things taste sweet without risking sugar use. However, many people find that using artificial sweeteners makes them crave sugar even more. If you find you want more sweet treats after drinking a diet soda or eating a snack made with Splenda, its best to eliminate them entirely from your diet.

Bread is the number one challenge that Atkins dieters face when looking at their new diet plans. Bread is a staple food for many people, and eliminating it can be somewhat of a problem. There are some low carb breads available out there, but you have to watch for hidden carbohydrates and other unacceptable ingredients. If you are ambitious, you can try making your own bread out of almond flour or other non-traditional flours.

Many people say that they love pasta, but people vary rarely eat it plain. The best part about pasta is the topping. So taking those toppings (meat, cheese and vegetables) and putting them over something else is an easy solution. Many people who follow the Atkins plan have found that squash makes a good pasta substitute. Spaghetti squash, a yellow orange gourd with stringy insides, is a natural base for homemade meat sauce. Zucchini is also a good pasta substitute. You can grate in into fine pieces or chunk it up into sections to act as a base for sauces. Lasagna is easily made with large pieces of eggplant as a substitute for the noodles. The meats and cheeses used in lasagna are low-carb so there's nothing to worry about there.

Another common problem for Atkins dieters is finding a good substitute for rice. One popular solution is to use cauliflower. Simply place the cauliflower florettes in a food processor and chop them until they are rice sizes pieces. Then microwave the "rice" without water. The pieces will come out fluffy and ready to be used in casseroles or as part of a side dish.

Cauliflower is also a popular potato substitute for Atkins dieters. This time, puree the cauliflower until it is smooth and creamy, just like mashed potatoes. You can add your favorite low-carb topping to it like bacon, sour cream and cheese.

Pizza is a favorite food for many people, but there are Atkins friendly solutions for homemade pizzas that taste just as good. You can make small pizzas using low-carb tortillas as the crust. You can also use the same method with large Portobello mushrooms. If the alternative crust options don't sound good to you, you can also try a pizza casserole with all of the ingredient layered in a casserole dish.

These substitutes will help you avoid indulging in your high-carb favorites while on the Atkins diet.

Atkins and Sugar Cravings

Sugar is everywhere you look and it might pop up in some surprising places. Did you know that most whole grain breads have at least one form of sugar in them? We have a national sweet tooth epidemic. Even if you don't eat a lot of sugary treats you may experience intense sugar cravings in the first few weeks of the Atkins diet. So many "healthy" carbohydrate foods have hidden sugars in them, your body may be experiencing withdrawal.

The problem with sugar is that your blood sugar is tied into your energy levels and your overall health. When your blood sugar is too low, you will experience intense cravings. High blood sugar is a result of eating high-sugar meals. When you eat concentrated sugar, your blood sugar will raise to high levels. Your pancreas thinks there is something wrong and then it secretes insulin to lower the blood sugar. As this happens more, you can create pre-diabetic conditions in your body as your pancreas becomes worn out and eventually cannot secrete insulin.

Fortunately, getting started on the Atkins diet plan can put a stop to this cycle. However, this doesn't mean that sugar cravings go away automatically. Sugar products are everywhere and temptation is sometimes hard to fight.

The best way to approach sugar cravings is with planning. If you maintain a balance of protein, fat and fiber in your daily diet you will prevent blood sugar drops that lead to sugar cravings. Also, do not go too long between meals without eating. Snacks are an important part of keeping your blood sugar stable. Have some handy snacks like cheese, nuts, seeds and boiled eggs on hand with you so you can quickly stabilize your blood sugar without turning to sweet treats.

Sugar cravings can also be a sign of a nutritional deficiency. When you are low on magnesium, you will crave chocolate and other sweets. Zinc and chromium can also stave off sugar cravings. If you aren't taking a good multivitamin supplement with these minerals, start immediately. If you are and you are still experiencing cravings, consider trying additional supplements of these nutrients.

Another tactic is to brush your teeth. Many Atkins dieters find that brushing their teeth or using Listerine breath strips can help with cravings. Both methods will numb your mouth and prevent you from wanting to eat. Drinking two large glasses of water can also help eliminate cravings. If your stomach is full, then you'll be less likely to reach for a sugary treat.

Sometimes out of sight, out of mind is the best approach. If you find yourself overcome with cravings while you are at home, get outside and take a walk. The distraction will have you forgetting your sugar craving in no time. Calling a friend for support or logging into an Atkins support forum can also go a long way toward preventing you from succumbing to sugar cravings.

Having a low-carb version of your favorite treat is another good idea. You are less likely to feel deprived if you can have a satisfying low carb treat. There are a wide variety of low-carb products available on the market that can beat your sweet tooth. Low-carb yogurt, chocolate, ice cream and candy can all help you stay on the Atkins plan and still get something sweet to eat.

Sugar cravings are a reality of following the Atkins plan, but the previous tips will help you overcome them and stay committed to your weight loss efforts.

Atkins Snack Choices

We live in a society of nibblers. Long gone are the traditional three square meals per day. Today, people eat at their desks, catch a snack in the afternoon and eat late night goodies. Most, if not all, of these snacks are carbohydrate based and full of sugar. This poses a challenge to people who are trying to follow the Atkins plan. Snacking is a necessary part of keeping your blood sugar up, but most packaged snack foods are forbidden on the plan.

Sweet snacks are high in calories, full of empty carbohydrates and offer no nutritional value. But they sure are popular. There is actually a Snack Food Association that tracks sales of packaged snack foods. It is estimated that Americans eat 3.1 billion pounds of chocolate. Snacking has increased more than a third since 1988. Sales of snack foods gross over \$30 billion a year.

If you've been a snack food junkie you've become used to eating carbohydrates of the worst kind. Snack foods are made from highly refined carbohydrates like white flour, white sugar, corn meal and corn syrup. They are high in trans-fats (which is a contributor to clogged arteries). All in all, they are probably one of the worst food choices you could be making.

But there is hope! You can conquer your love of snack foods by making Atkins-friendly snacking choices. Before you can make the switch, make sure to educate yourself. Understand just how dangerous trans fats can be by reading up on them. Then read the ingredients label of your favorite snack foods. You may be shocked to discover how many trans fats, artificial flavorings and preservatives that you are eating.

Next, get rid of all of the snack foods in your house. If its not there, then you can't eat it. Junk food is not good for anyone in your home so ignore your family's complaints and do what is best for the health of everyone.

Now you'll need to replace those snack foods with some better choices. Giving up your snack foods is not the same as giving up snacks. Snacks should be a part of your daily eating plan because it will help you from becoming too hungry and indulging in high-carbohydrate treats.

There are plenty of low carbohydrate snacks that are easy to make and simple to have around the house. String cheese sticks or small cheese rounds are very easy to keep in the refrigerator. Meat snacks are also a good choice. You can buy jerky strips and other meat products that keep well for long periods of time. When you buy cheese or meat sticks, make sure to read the labels carefully for hidden carbs.

There are low carb instant soups available that are very easy to make and satisfying if you are craving something hot. Low carb soy chips and celery can help with "crunchy" cravings. Try adding peanut butter or cream cheese spread to

add more protein to these snacks. Also, you can't beat a handful of nuts for a high-protein, quick snack.

All of the previously mentioned snacks are good for the initial phases of the Atkins diet and beyond. If you are past the induction phase, you can enjoy berries with cream as a snack. There are also many acceptable fruits that make good snacks for the pre-maintenance phase.

Atkins and Diabetes

The Atkins diet principles lay the foundation for a healthy, more balanced way of eating than the standard American diet. Its emphasis is on using good carbohydrates in balance with adequate protein. This is in stark contrast to what most Americans eat on a daily basis. The average American eats lots of processed foods that have hidden sugars and highly processed carbohydrates. This has put most Americans on the road to diabetes and pre-diabetic conditions. What is sad is that diabetes has a predictable set of stages and that they can be easily recognized.

The road to diabetes has to do with something called the glycemic index. All carbohydrates are rated on this index with regards to the level of insulin reaction they produce. Foods that have a high glycemic index rating will cause your pancreas to release a lot of insulin to break down the amount of sugars and carbohydrates (which produce high amounts of glucose). The refined carbohydrates and sugars that make up the vast majority of the American diet rank very high on the glycemic index.

We are able to more readily digest these foods as children, because our bodies function more efficiently in our youth. There may have been side effects, like weight gain and mood swings, but they didn't stand out. As we age, however, these symptoms begin to grow and become more prevalent. The nation-wide obesity epidemic is a result of high-carbohydrate diets and unstable blood sugar levels.

Many people who are overweight are also insulin resistant. Insulin resistance means that the insulin is not doing its job in removing glucose from the blood stream. The pancreas gets over worked and it releases massive amounts of insulin, sometimes 20 times more than the body actually needs. This results in the blood sugar dropping to extremely low levels. This sets off a chain reaction in the body that leads to a release of adrenaline to correct the blood sugar problem.

With age, blood sugar and insulin difficulties become more aggravated. The condition is called "hyperinsulinism" and is a precursor for type II diabetes. It is normally accompanied by high blood pressure and high triglycerides.

After years of using a high-carbohydrate diet, you will finally become fully diabetic. Insulin is the body's primary fat creator and extra pounds usually accompany late onset diabetes. Pre-diabetic conditions, if not treated effectively, will lead to diabetes indefinitely.

However, there are easily identifiable warning signs to diabetes that appear early. Your family doctor can perform insulin level tests that will let you know if you are at risk for pre-diabetic conditions, and studies show that low-carb diets like Atkins can help. Controlling your blood sugar is one of the most effective methods to controlling pre-diabetic conditions.

The Atkins diet helps effectively control blood sugar. The combination of proteins, fats and good carbohydrates will keep your body satisfied without the roller coaster effect. Controlling carbohydrates in quantity as well as type will help limit the insulin spikes. This will let your pancreas work in the way that it was meant to be, and it will decrease the likelihood of your developing pre-diabetic conditions. It's a vicious cycle that, if left unchecked, can lead to diabetes later in life. When the Atkins diet is followed effectively it produces stable blood sugar throughout the day and helps you stay off the road to diabetes.

Atkins and Intestinal Problems

The major complaint of those who use the Atkins diet is the intestinal problems that are associated with reducing carbohydrates. These problems can include constipation and diarrhea. These symptoms can happen to anybody at some point, but those who follow a low-carb diet are especially prone.

Most commonly dieters will experience diarrhea during the early days of induction. This is a result of the body getting rid of excess carbohydrates. It also marks the beginning of the ketosis process. So in actuality, experiencing diarrhea at the beginning of the diet is a good thing. It indicates that you are on the road to becoming a fat burning machine.

Constipation is a side effect of lack of fiber in the low carb diet. Whole grains, legumes and fruit are the normal sources of dietary fiber, and they are all restricted on the Atkins diet's initial phases.

However, you shouldn't be scared off from the low-carb way of life because of these issues. There are simple solutions that can prevent and help with these symptoms and allow you to continue with staying on the diet plan.

The first tip is to make sure to include the proper amount of low-carb vegetables in your daily diet. In the induction phase, you can eat up to 20 grams of carbohydrates per day. This is roughly equal to 3 cups of salad vegetables. Some people are tempted to use their carbohydrate grams on cheese or artificially sweetened soda. Eating acceptable vegetables is a vital part of maintaining intestinal health while following the Atkins plan. It's also important to drink a minimum of 8 eight-ounce glasses of water per day and get exercise. Both of these steps can help with intestinal programs.

If you are experiencing constipation specifically, then there are many methods for relief. When you switch from a diet full of processed and refined sugar products, your body will need some time to adjust to this new way of eating. You'll need to make sure to up your fiber intake with acceptable vegetables and fruits (certain fruits are allowed after the initial induction phase). You can also try a fiber supplement like sugar-free Metamucil.

Make sure you are eating enough fats and oils. Constipation can be a result of too little fat in your diet. Adding tablespoon of olive oil or flax oil to salads or other vegetables can help your intestinal health. Also, try to incorporate a variety of vegetables in your salad. Pale iceberg lettuce does not have much fiber in it. Try dark green lettuces or have a serving of dark green steamed veggies (broccoli, asparagus or spinach are good choices).

If these tips don't work, try cutting out all salt from your diet for a couple of days. This includes pickles, mustard, diet soda, ham, bacon and bottled salad dressing.

This will decrease your fluid retention and sometimes helps with bowel movements.

Diarrhea should not be a problem after the first week of the Induction plan. However, on rare occasion, it does persist longer. First, analyze your diet. If you are eating low carb protein bars or other sugar free products, eliminate them. They may contain sweeteners like glycerine, sorbitol and malitol which are known to cause diarrhea and gas. Homemade low carb desserts may also be a cause of problems. Most of them use maltodextrin, an artificial sweetener used in baking. Maltodextrin is made from corn and can cause problems for some people.

If you are not used to eating raw vegetables everyday, this may be a cause of diarrhea. Understand that your body will adjust to the vegetables and the intestinal side effects won't last forever. Make sure you are chewing your raw vegetables thoroughly. Also, using lightly steamed vegetables rather than raw can be a solution to this problem.

Intestinal problems are common during the first portion of the Atkins diet. Keep in mind, however, that these problems will go away within the first few weeks of the new way of eating. If the problems persist, try the previously mentioned tips to get relief.

Atkins and Exercise

There is a lot of attention paid in the Atkins diet plan towards food and cooking. It's true that your food choices on the diet are of utmost importance. But a lot of people make the mistake of ignoring exercise. The newly released Atkins food pyramid shows the importance of exercise. It shows an increase in food options with increased activity. Exercise is important on the Atkins diet, and important for everyone's overall health.

Exercise is beneficial to body, mind and soul. It has many major benefits, even at limited levels. It not only burns fat but it boosts your metabolism and increases circulation. Daily exercise helps your body eliminate toxins through sweat glands and lymph systems. It is especially important to all low-carb weight loss programs because it regulates blood sugar levels.

Physical exercise is essential for Atkins diet success. Without exercise, your body isn't configured to process carbohydrates successfully. Research has shown that sedentary individuals have extreme insulin reactions to even moderate amounts of carbohydrates. This means that exercise doesn't only help you lose weight, it will help you keep it off too. Exercise will teach your body how to process the carbohydrates in your diet. When you exercise regularly, you'll be able to eat more carbohydrates over time because your body will use them efficiently.

There are two basic types of exercise: aerobic exercise and anaerobic exercise. The best regimen combines these two forms each week.

Aerobic exercise's primary goal is to increase your heart rate. This causes your body to consume more oxygen and it gives all of your cells a fresh supply of oxygen. If you've been without physical activity for a while, many of those cells have been deprived. Aerobic exercise will regenerate them and help you feel better in times when you aren't exercising.

If you've been inactive for a while, it may take some time to get used to your new aerobic workouts. You may want to get some advice from your primary care doctor or a professional aerobics instructor. Make sure to start slowly to give yourself time to adjust to your new movements. It's essential that you learn how to stretch and warm up correctly in order to avoid muscle strain. Some good beginning aerobic activities include walking, golf, tennis and dancing. These activities won't cause a lot of strain on your body, but they will get your heart moving. Start slowly and set small goals for yourself. For example, if you are starting a walking program begin by walking four blocks. Then increase your training to five blocks, then six. Your body will respond well to the exercise...after all your body was meant to move!

Anaerobic exercise includes any activity that isn't technically aerobic. Most of the exercises in this category build muscle mass. Weightlifting and strength training are examples of anaerobic exercises. Working out with weights is an important

part of losing weight. As you lose fat, you'll need to replace it with muscle in order to stay lean. Don't be afraid of working out with weights. You won't need to become a bodybuilder. Weight bearing exercises like isometrics and resistance training will help improve your bone density, your posture and your fat burning potential.

If an exercise program is not part of your weight loss efforts, you are setting yourself up for failure. Make a commitment to incorporating exercise into your weight loss efforts and you'll see the results immediately.

Common Mistakes Of Atkins Dieters

The Atkins diet is one of the simplest weight loss plans to follow. Although the principles are clearly set out in the books, there are some common misconceptions that occur for dieters. These mistakes can make a big difference in the amount of weight you lose and effectiveness of the diet overall. If Atkins isn't working for you, or you find yourself suddenly gaining weight after weeks of effective dieting, make sure you aren't making any of these common mistakes.

First, make sure to be patient with your weight loss. If you lose 8 lbs per week on the Induction phase and then slow down once you enter ongoing weight loss phase, this is perfectly normal. The level of carbohydrate grams that are acceptable on the Induction portion of the diet are not meant to carry you through the rest of your dieting experience. Induction is meant to break you of carbohydrate cravings and detoxify your body from sugar. Starting with the ongoing weight loss phase, you will begin introducing small levels of carbohydrate grams each week. This may slow down weight loss a bit from the level it was at during Induction, but this is completely normal.

Also, people are different and react differently to the diet. Some people lose weight in spurts, and other lose weight more steadily. A plateau can last for a few weeks and then voila, you've lost five pounds in a matter of a few days.

Make sure you are avoiding caffeine in all of its forms as well as aspartame, a common artificial sweetener. Both of these chemicals can impact blood sugar levels negatively. Look out for caffeine in coffee and diet sodas. Watch out for aspartame in diet sodas and sugar-free gelatin. These can cause cravings for sugar and take your body out of ketosis after just one serving.

Watch your daily intake of cheese. Although cheese is on the acceptable foods list, it does have small amount of carbohydrates. Your best bet is to limit your cheese intake to 4 oz per day. You can have more on special occasions, but it should not be used as your mainstay for protein. Meats, eggs and tofu are much better choices and don't contain carbohydrate grams.

Remember to emphasize vegetables during Induction and beyond. Your carbohydrate grams should be primarily derived from leafy, green vegetables and other acceptable vegetable choices. Vegetables fill you up without spiking your blood sugar. They provide essential fiber and nutrients that help your weight loss efforts and overall health. After induction, you should have 3-4 cups of salad and 1 cup of cooked vegetables each day. Make sure the vegetables you are using are on the acceptable foods list. Eliminating vegetables from your diet can shut down your metabolism and cause your weight loss to stall.

It is also very important that you eat regularly while you are on the Atkins plan. Never go more than five waking hours without eating a combined snack of protein and fats. Two things happen when you skip meals. First, you cause a

blood sugar drop that will have you craving carbohydrates like bread and sugar. Secondly, continued periods of not eating will slow down your metabolism and make it even harder to lose weight.

Finally, make sure you are drinking enough water each day. Water has a myriad of benefits for every human being, not just those on the Atkins diet. Thirst can sometimes be masked as hunger, so staying well hydrated will keep you from craving foods you shouldn't be eating. Water also helps you avoid constipation, which is an occasional side effect of the Atkins diet. Drinking 8 eight ounce glasses of water per day will also help you flush out the toxins from your system that are produced when you burn fat.

These common mistakes can make people frustrated with the Atkins diet when there is no need to be. If you are just starting out on the diet, make sure to prepare yourself for these mistakes. If you've been on the diet for some time, evaluate your eating habits and make sure you are following the program correctly.

Overcoming Plateaus On The Atkins Diet

If you are experiencing a stall or plateau in your Atkins weight loss efforts, you are not alone. This occurs from time to time. However, you first must make sure that you have actually reached a plateau point.

A plateau means that you have gone an extended period of time without losing weight or inches. It's important to take your measurements before you start your weight loss plan, in addition to your weight. On some weeks it may not seem like you are losing any at all on the scale. But a quick look at your measurements will prove otherwise.

On the Atkins diet you are replacing fat with muscle, which is denser and heavier. You might actually gain a little weight because you are building muscle to replace your fat. The result will be an increase on the scale, but a decrease in your inches. Your body will be smaller and leaner, but you may weigh the same.

Before you start your program, measure your chest, waist, hips, upper arms, thighs and calves. You never know where you may be losing inches, so it's important to have these comprehensive measurements to refer to. It is normal to go through periods where your body is readjusting. Remember that you are reforming the composition of your body and this process will take some time. Check your measurements once a week, just like your weight, and you can track your overall progress.

There may be periods of 3 to 4 weeks where you have a stall in weight loss, but a loss in inches. Or vice versa. Using both methods to track your fat loss is the best assurance for an accurate measure of your progress. These stall periods are not a reason to quit or to give up. They are natural parts of the weight loss process.

Stalls may occur more frequently if you are 5 to 10 pounds away from being at your goal weight. By following a low-carb, high-protein way of eating you have created a lot more muscle in your body. Your muscle-to-fat ratio is higher than ever before, so your body might be resisting losing anymore fat. It may be time to rethink your goal weight. Perhaps your body is trying to tell you something and its time to start maintaining your weight loss rather than trying to lose more.

There are some other possible causes of stalls and plateaus on the road to weight loss. If you've gone four weeks with no change in weight or measurements and you are nowhere near your goal weight, you can try a few different methods to get yourself out of the rut. First, make sure your carbohydrate level is in check. If you are eating too many carbohydrate grams per day, your weight loss will stall. Look for hidden carbohydrates in packaged foods, dressings and sauces to make sure they aren't the culprits in your plateau.

Check your daily water intake. When you are dehydrated, your body will retain water and that can mimic a plateau. Water will also help flush ketones from your system and make more room for new fat burning ketones.

Undereating can also be a cause for weight loss plateaus. Make sure not to let yourself go hungry and eat smaller, more frequent meals. Remember, you are on a carbohydrate-restricted diet, not a calorie-restricted diet. Make sure to have some protein with every meal and snack. Never go more than 5 hours without eating something (except overnight of course). Also, eat freely from the acceptable foods. Don't try to count calories or restrict your calorie intake. When your body gets too few calories, it goes into starvation mode and will hold onto fat cells.

Increasing your exercise level can help get you through a plateau as well. As your muscles get used to working out at a certain level, you'll have to increase the duration or the intensity in order to keep challenging your body. Add a new exercise into the mix, or try increasing weight in resistance training.

Trying one of these methods will most likely get your weight loss back on track. Remember that occasional stalls are normal, but they do not have to last.

Finally,

While the Atkins diet is very popular, it also comes with a lot of criticism. Health experts, doctors and diet specialists come from all different opinions when it comes to the Atkins diet and other low carb diets. Some believe that it is dangerous, some say that it is a healthy method to lose weight and others say that it works on a short-term basis.

However, there are also thousands of individuals who have found success with the Atkins diet. They can speak from personal experience and know that the diet works and it is an effective means of keeping weight off. There are thousands of testimonials that tout the benefits of the low carb way of living.

There are many typical criticisms of the Atkins diet. One of the first is that the diet is too high in fat. The butter, oil and fatty meats that are used in the Atkins diet are a far cry from the low-fat diet fad that recently swept the nation. For many people, the low fat mindset has prevailed and they cannot fathom eating real butter or cream with their meals. It seems like too much fat at first glance. However, those that pay close attention to Dr. Atkins guidelines and follow the program closely know that the diet focuses on good fats. Extra virgin olive oil and other helpful fats are emphasized. The proper use of these oils is important to brain function and mood management.

Another popular Atkins criticism is that it focuses too much on food and not enough on exercise. This is an unfair claim because the Atkins books clearly spell out a need for exercise. There is a lot of attention paid to food choices because they are an integral part of the program, and they are different foods than what people are normally used to eating. However, this does not mean that exercise is not an integral part of the Atkins program. Aerobic and anaerobic exercise regimens are encouraged, and both will greatly increase your weight loss efforts.

Many Atkins critics feel that the diet is hard to keep up in the long term. Critics in this category will admit that Atkins is effective in short-term weight loss efforts, but point out that the lifestyle is hard to maintain over time. However, people who have had long term success with Atkins claim it is one of the easiest diets to follow for significant periods of time. The Atkins plan has rich food that is forbidden on other programs, and it has appetite-suppressing effects. When you combine this with the quick weight loss, a motivating factor for many people, Atkins is easy to stick to long term.

The side effects of Atkins, like constipation and bad breath, have also been a topic that Atkins critics are quick to point out. However, these side effects are not as common as critics make them out to be. If they do occur, the side effects normally last through the first phase of the diet. Additionally, drinking additional water will normally take care of both problems rather quickly.

There are pros and cons to many diets. If you don't particularly enjoy preparing and eating meat, then Atkins is probably not for you. But if you are considering Atkins, make sure to look beyond the common criticisms for the truth about the diet.

