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Fad or Fact: Sorting Out Conflicting Nutritional Advice

Nutrition and weight loss are fascinating subjects. No wonder there is so much written about them. But with all of the books and magazine articles around, it can be very confusing for the average person.

Recently, the hype around high protein and low carbohydrate diets has swept the continent. And they keep springing up. There's*The Atkins Diet*, *The Zone*, *The Carbohydrate Addicts*, *Eat Yourself Slim Somersize Program*, and *Sugar Busters!* amongst a host of others.

The Fad

These popular diets are sexy compared to the recommendations of registered dietitians, perhaps because the media creates a buzz around them.

The lure of the quick fix should never be underestimated. Most people want to see results fast and without exerting too much effort. These diets promise success and seem easy. Celebrity endorsements make these quick fixes even more enticing. When Oprah aired a show on *The Carbohydrate Addict's Diet*, millions followed her lead and bought into it. But the truth is, Oprah is not an expert, nor is Suzanne Somers.

The Facts

The proof that these diets work is not based on conventional research. Years of investigation are needed to support or disclaim any diet theory. Without this type of scrutiny, it becomes hard for most dietitians and healthcare professionals to support dietary claims made in the diet books above.

Get your information from books or articles written by experts, with a scientific background. Registered dietitians are experts in nutrition. (Academic requirements for nutritionists are **not** the same as those for dietitians).

The credentials of the authors of most of the diet books above are sketchy at best. Barry Sears, author of *The Zone*, has a Ph.D. in biochemistry. *The Carbohydrate Addicts* creator Rachael Heller is a psychologist, and her husband Richard is a biologist. And, of course, Suzanne Somers is an actress!

Reliable Nutrition Advice

Carbohydrates, protein and fat are all called macronutrients, or large nutrients (as opposed to the micronutrients such minerals and vitamins). Nutrients provide the body with the necessary tools to function. Without food, the body eventually dies. Each macronutrient is used for a specific purpose. Carbohydrates (made of glucose or sugar), for example, provide energy for chemical reactions throughout the body. Protein breaks down into amino acids for growth and repair while fat provides essential fatty acids also necessary for growth and repair and the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins.

Leaving out these nutrients in your diet can lead to health problems. These high-protein, low-carb diets suggest eliminating certain foods and, sometimes, entire food groups to achieve weight loss. By cutting back on carbohydrates you'll lower your intake of the necessary fiber and essential vitamins and minerals the body requires to stay healthy and strong.

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The dangers of high protein diets include increased risk of **heart disease** (due to the high saturated fat content) and a higher risk of **cancer** because foods rich in antioxidants, such as fruits and vegetables, are kept to a minimum). High-protein diets also**leach calcium** from the bones, which pass into the urine and can cause **kidney stones** or other kidney troubles, especially if there's a family history of kidney problems. Other risks include **ketosis**, which happens when the body mobilizes lean muscle mass instead of fat for energy; ketosis is damaging and can be fatal for diabetics.

High protein diets will also cause fluid loss. This accounts for most of weight lost. Fluid losses and electrolyte imbalances lead to**dehydration**. Symptoms range from a general sick feeling to more serious complications.

The average diet should include whole grains such as multi-grain breads, pasta, whole-grain rice and fruits and vegetables. To balance meals for the rest of the day include dairy products such as 1 cup of lower-fat milk or soy beverage, ½ cup of yogurt and servings of animal or plant protein, such as 3 ounces of fish or 1 cup of lentil soup.

Though not nearly as flashy or as quick, healthy weight loss includes variety, moderation, and portion control. You should eat plenty of fruits and vegetables and participate in physical activity if you want to maintain or lose weight and keep the pounds off.