

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Low-Carb Diet Under Attack”

As many as 45 million people in the United States go on a diet each year and US individuals reportedly spend around \$33 billion on weight loss products annually. Truly, the current data on diets is terribly conflicted and confusing. The two-thirds of the population that are either overweight or obese have a plethora of diets to choose from. From low-fat to high-fat, keto diets and intermittent fasting, such that the fads are too numerous to count. Study results are at times diametrically opposed. Counseling patients on healthy dietary patterns is challenging. So much information abounds that it can be hard to separate the wheat from the chaff. A case in point is the advisability of a low carbohydrate diet for weight loss and for overall health. Low-carb, high-protein diets result in greater weight loss over a given period compared with calorically equivalent diets that contain relatively more carbohydrates. A new study was presented at the European Society of Cardiology Congress concluded that a low intake of carbs raises the risk of premature mortality, as well as mortality from several chronic illnesses. Therefore, scientists urge dieters to avoid low-carb diets. Overall, the analysis using data from the survey found that those who consumed the least amount of carbs were 32% more likely to die prematurely from any cause. This was in comparison with participants who ate the most carbs. Also, low-carb consumers were 51% more likely to die from coronary heart disease, 50% more likely to die from cerebrovascular disease, and 35% more likely to die of cancer. The associations were strongest among older, non-obese people. These results were replicated in the meta-analysis, which found that the overall risk of death from any cause was 15% higher in people who consumed the least amount of carbs, the risk of cardiovascular death was 13% higher, and that of dying of cancer was 8% higher. A diet quality score based on the PURE study, which advocates eating more of seven key foods — fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, fish, dairy, and non-processed red meat — has been linked to lower mortality and cardiovascular events in three independent data sets. The most successful diet is one that patients can stick to. Plenty of diets have proven effective for weight loss and weight maintenance. When dieters fail, it is because they attempt to follow diets that are too restrictive, are unbalanced, or cause rapid weight loss, which leads to yo-yo dieting. Cook meals at home (from scratch, if possible). Processed foods and beverages—including packaged snacks, smoked meats, white flour, and sugar-sweetened items—should be eaten only occasionally.

In the America that I love, please enjoy your food and live each day with joy in your heart.

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