

Atkins Diet Basics

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.

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