

Making	Sense	Of	'Low	Carb	Diets'
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Humans are the only of Allah's creations to be endowed with such large brains. This large brain size requires a steady and large supply of food to keep it functioning and one of the ways humans keep this large brain functioning was by cultivating a sweet tooth. Our ever increasing desire for sweets could be taken as a testament to our intellectual prowess; since the brain operates on the simplest of sugars, glucose. The adult brain consumes 18 percent of our energy, even though it only makes up 2 percent of the weight of an average adult (Pollen, 291). That is a lot of sugar, so it is no wonder that the brain sends such powerful signals for us to eat that chocolate bar. Yet, does this mean that a candy bar is the best source of fuel? The good news is no. There are various other glucose sources other than refined sugars or honey. All carbohydrates break down into a simple form of sugar. All carbohydrates, as well as protein and fat provide energy to our bodies.



Carbohydrates break down into the simple sugars, glucose, fructose and galactose. For our purposes, we will focus on glucose, since the other two are not stored in the human body in abundant amounts (Whitney and Rolfes, 104-109). Glucose provides our bodies with the energy it needs to perform the various tasks of keeping us functioning. Most importantly it is the preferred "food" of the brain.

So you may be asking, if all carbohydrates break down into glucose in the body, why shouldn't I drink soda and eat candy all day?" Since I was a child I lived on that premises, and I reigned supreme as the queen of jelly beans, but it was not a very prudent idea. Over the years my body was depleted of many vitamins and minerals, most notably the B-complex vitamins that help us deal with physical and emotional stress. As we become increasingly deficient in vitamins and minerals, disease states can arise, if we do not act in time. The purpose of this series of articles is to prevent us from entering such disease states, insha'Allah.

In addition to our large brains, we are also omnivores and much of that brain power was and is (well perhaps not for those of us eating microwave dinners), spent deciding on what to eat. Few other species share this dilemma. In this country at least, what to eat has become a national past-time. Michael Pollan wrote in *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, this is an "American Paradox-that is, a notably unhealthy people obsessed by the idea of eating healthy" (Pollen, 3). This leads us to the idea of "low carbohydrate" diets that are so popular today. "Low carb" is such a popular health term these days that most people believe they know what a carbohydrate is and think it is bad for you.

On the contrary, according to Paula Batholomy, Director of Hawthorn Health and Nutrition Institute, a human could not survive long without carbohydrates. Fruits, vegetables and whole grains are carbohydrates. These wholesome foods are lumped together with soda, candy, sugar, heavily processed foods, such as white

flour, white sugar and white rice. Even the US food pyramid mixes refined and whole carbohydrates, further clouding the issue. Although watermelon has a high sugar content, it can not be compared to a "watermelon" flavored fruit roll-up. Yet these two things are both carbohydrates. The reason why this works out this way is that both the watermelon and fruit roll-up are broken down by our body into a simple sugar. However, we know that these two things are not the same, why?

**“Due to our unique needs we all require carbohydrates in various amounts. Despite popular trends, there is no fixed formula for carbohydrate consumption.”**

Fruits, vegetables and whole grains, even raw sugar cane contain significant amounts of water and fiber. It is the fiber content that helps the body maintains blood-sugar levels by slowing down the digestive process. A donut, candy bar or can of soda rushes through the blood stream causing a spike in blood sugar, commonly called a sugar rush.

Many diets that promote "low carb" intake advise this because sudden spikes in blood sugar are associated with excess weight gain and disease. When too many processed carbohydrates are consumed, the body's natural ability to remove excess sugar diminishes and insulin becomes scarce. Excess glucose (a simple sugar) is then stored in ever-increasing fat tissue, instead of being escorted out of the body. Over time this process produces ever-expanding waist lines and diabetes. Adult on-set diabetes, a once rare condition, was renamed Type II, since so many young people develop this condition. So, yes, it is true that processed carbohydrates are detrimental to your health, but not including whole grains, fruits and vegetables can also be too. We would be hard pressed to find an obese person who became over weight gorging on fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

I have talked about whole grains and their superiority over their white, refined cousins and there are several reasons why. Whole grains are brown grains that were not stripped of their nutrients to make a less coarse product like white rice and white bread. It is true that white grains taste better to our altered taste buds, but they usually end up being harder on the digestive track because of lack of vital nutrients and high sugar content. Whole foods (not the super market chain), food that contain their enzymes, vitamins and minerals, also contain an added benefit of providing a catalyst to aid digestion, enzymes. Homemade whole wheat bread is enzyme rich and is one of the most nutritious foods. Although much controversy surrounds the consumption of bread and the decline of human health since we began eating bread, as I discovered, many foods that many be deemed nutritious for some, may be depleting to others. A case in point is candida, or chronic yeast infection. It is estimated that 1 in three people have a candida over growth, with the estimate being higher amongst younger people (Gates,4). The yeast and sugars in bread feed this condition, rendering one of nature's boons to civilization, uneatable. Many times it is our inappropriate eating habits that lead to candida.

If processed and refined carbohydrates are part of the problem, then whole



grains, fruits and vegetables, are a huge part of the solution. Aim to include one fruit and one vegetable to each meal. The recommended amount per day is five servings of fruits and vegetables a day. If you are not use to consuming fruits and vegetables, go slowly so your digestive track can adjust to the new foods. When changing eating patterns it is easy to become confused about what to eat or even frightened to eat. Although many carbohydrates are excellent sources of nurturance, do not forsake protein and fats. They too are essential to over all health. A high carbohydrate diet is not for everyone. As Roman philosopher Lucretius said "one man's food is another man's poison." Find a balance; it is important to find out what works for you and your family.

Try this experiment, eat a bowl of oatmeal and toast for breakfast, if you become hungry within a few hours, you are the type that requires more protein and fat to be full. The next day prepare a three egg omelet with your choice of vegetables, onion, tomato, spinach, mushrooms etc. If you do not feel the need to eat soon after, you are a high protein type. May Allah make your path clear and easy.

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