



Low-Carb and High-Calorie

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Based on the success some people are experiencing with low-carb diets for weight loss, at least in the short-term, many have come to assume that foods low in carbohydrates are also low in calories. That's not necessarily true. Ultimately, maintaining a healthy weight comes from calorie consumption that matches the calories you burn.

Foods labeled "low-carb" are not necessarily lower in calories than "regular" versions. For example, ice cream labeled "for use with low-carb diets" often contains 130 to 150 calories in a half-cup serving, which is the same as regular ice cream. People who think that this "diet" ice cream allows larger portions will find themselves in real trouble. Light ice cream, on the other hand, truly is lower in calories.

A typical low-carb brownie mix produces a brownie with virtually the same calorie content as regular versions. It just costs more than four times as much. If you make a pan full of low-carb brownies, are you really going to eat just one? Unless you are preparing food for a party, a smarter way to satisfy a desire for something sweet or chocolatey might be to buy one small brownie or cookie from the bakery rather than having 1500 calories of low-carb brownies sitting around.

Some foods that are naturally low in carbohydrates have suddenly developed an undeserved reputation as low-calorie foods. Most of the low-carb diets now officially advise that protein foods be eaten only in amounts to satisfy hunger, and some even

specify that lean meats should be chosen instead of fatty bacon and sausage. Many consumers seem to hear only half the message, and have developed the idea that these diets allow endless portions of fatty meats. These meats may have zero carbohydrates, but eight to ten-ounce portions that contain 600 to 1000 calories are not likely to promote long-term weight control for most people. In fact, one skill that most people need to develop so they can maintain a healthy weight is learning to follow hunger signals rather than eating the whole portion they are served or what is available.

Likewise, oils contain no carbohydrates, but eating too much fat used in cooking or flavoring food (such as salad dressing and dip) allows calories to add up quickly. Some added fat is a healthful part of balanced eating, especially when it is in the form of oils like canola and olive oil. Just keep in mind that each tablespoon of oil adds 120 calories to your daily total. Nuts may be lower in carbs than potato chips or pretzels, but with 140 to 160 calories in a handful, you can't afford to mindlessly munch your way through a whole can. Nuts can help in weight control because they may satisfy hunger longer than the same amount of calories from refined carbohydrates like chips or sweets. But portion control of nuts is vital.

Finally, some low-carb products may be truly lower in calories than regular versions. The calorie savings may be relatively small, however, compared to the extra cost of these products. For example, low-carb tortillas or flatbreads for wraps may contain only 40 to 60 calories per ounce instead of the 68 to 72 calories per ounce in a regular tortilla. Does that make them worth twice the price? Instead you could choose a healthful whole-grain "regular" tortilla and save calories by limiting yourself to one, while enjoying additional servings of beans and veggies or a salad instead of eating another tortilla.

Turning to low-carb candy as your reward or for stress relief may save a few calories, but is it worth the extra money? If part of your weight problem is eating too many sweets, it might be more helpful to focus on learning non-food ways to cope or celebrate instead of relying on these products.

If you need help to improve your eating habits and prevent weight gain, *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*[™] can help. Contact your local base Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian for more information or visit the *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*[™] community website at <http://airforcemedicine.afms.mil/shapeyourfuture>.