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SheKnows : Health & Wellness : Diet & Fitness : Losing Weight : Is low carb better than low calorie dieting?

## Is low carb better than low calorie dieting?

**Low carb vs**  
low calorie diets  
Janice McDuffee

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Although women are on the eternal search to find a fast and easy diet, we often find that weight loss just doesn't work that way. Worse, the growing plethora of diet plans and products make dieting even more complicated. Two popular approaches to weight loss include counting carbs and cutting calories. But which is most effective? We asked two nutrition experts to give us the skinny on low carb and low calorie diets.



Regularly heard during weight-loss debates is the importance of counting carbs versus cutting calories. Which is most effective and how do you know which diet plan is right for you? We asked author and nutrition, health and fitness consultant [Dr. Janet Bond Brill](#) and [Peachy Seiden](#), the International Culinary School at the Art Institute of Ohio's expert nutritionist, to lend their expertise to help you make the right choices when selecting the best weight loss plan.

### The low down on the low carb diet

Low carb dieters restrict or completely avoid foods like bread, rice, high starch vegetables (like potatoes and carrots), and fruit. As a result, low carb diets are usually high in protein and fat.

The basis of the low carb diet is controlling blood sugar levels – the premise being that carbs raise your blood sugar level inducing an insulin release, which inevitably makes fat breakdown harder. Proponents of low carb diets say decreasing your carb intake will result in lower blood sugar levels, less insulin release and, ultimately, weight loss. In addition, without carbs to provide energy, your body will breakdown fat in its place.

However, experts don't agree on the connection between weight loss on a low carb diet and blood sugar or insulin levels.

### Low carb diet may not be a long-term solution

The reason for the popularity of low carb dieting is its ability to yield fast results. When we drastically change what we eat—oftentimes giving up foods that we love—we want to see the results and low carb diets require less patience. Depending on how much weight you need to lose, it is possible to lose 10 to 20 pounds in the first two weeks.

The downfall: the fast spiral in weight loss is short-lived. According to Seiden, cutting out carbs causes you to lose a great amount of water in the first two weeks before weight loss begins to slow down. Because the initial weight loss comes from water weight, it is also easy to gain weight back. Furthermore, maintaining a diet with no carbohydrates is not sustainable for life, and these diets, for most people, generally don't last a year.

**"Cut the carbs and you also cut the fiber and lose out on all the nutrients and disease-fighting antioxidants that the high carb foods you are restricting contain,"** warns Dr. Brill. **"Low carb also translates to high protein and high fat – a filling and tasty option for many, but not a good strategy for long-term weight control and good health."**

The tendency for low carb dieters to eat fatty meats and cheeses not only leads to a high calorie intake, the accompanying high protein intake can take its toll on the body. "Assuming you eat a lot of proteins, it's a strain on the kidneys to metabolize all the extra protein," explains Seiden. "Too much protein also increases calcium loss from the bones, and women are more susceptible to bone loss."

### Counting calories is a smart way to go

The answer comes with a balance between counting calories and eating carbs the right way. Both experts agree that counting calories is the most reliable, definitive method to lose weight but counting carbs is important, too.



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"When it comes to controlling weight, it's all in the calorie math," says Dr Brill. "Eat fewer calories and burn more calories through daily exercise and you have the secret to lifelong weight control," advises Dr. Brill. Keep in mind that the key to successful weight loss when cutting calories is to take a sensible approach and not consume too few. Over-restricting calories can set you up for binge eating, slow down your metabolism, and can cause nutrient deficiencies in the long run.

If you choose to count calories, you can still learn something from low carb diets. Though both experts agree that cutting out carbs completely isn't the best method to long-lasting weight loss, they point out that there is a difference between "good" and "bad" carbs.

"Carbs shouldn't be totally avoided, but the good kind of carbs should be chosen: complex carbs with medium to low glycemic index, like whole grain breads and cereals, beans and legumes," says Seiden.

### Aim for a realistic weight and healthy lifestyle

Both experts agree that no matter what diet plan you chose, your ultimate goal should be to shape your diet into a healthy lifestyle. That means adopting an healthy eating plan that you can follow for the long haul.

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Janice McDuffee is a graduate of news-editorial journalism from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. She now works in freelance writing and editing.

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