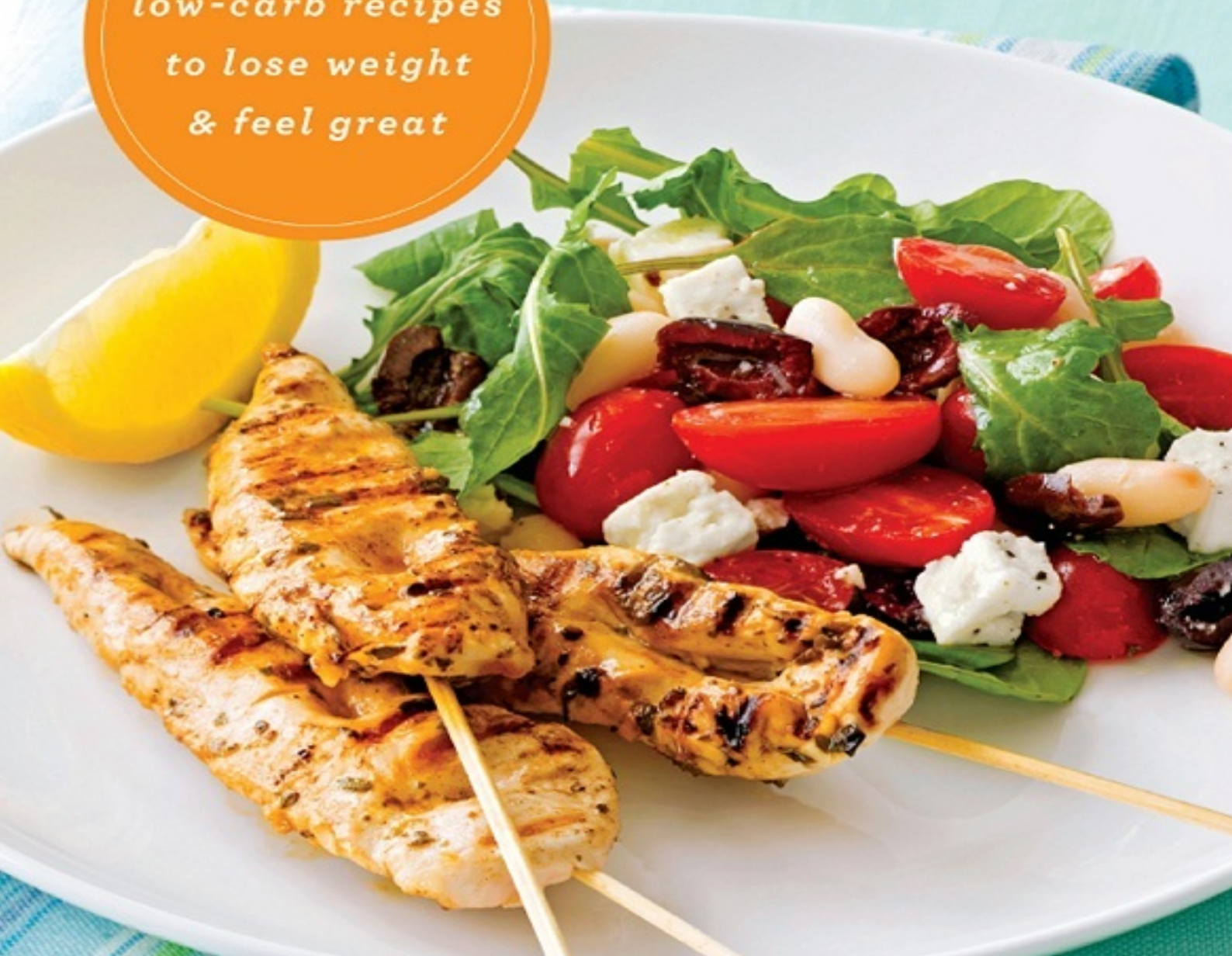


Low-Carb Cookbook

MENDOCINO PRESS

*everyday
low-carb recipes
to lose weight
& feel great*



Low-Carb Cookbook

**125 Easy, Healthy, and Delicious
Recipes for a Low-Carb Diet**

MENDOCINO PRESS

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Chocolate Bark with Nuts

Chocolate Truffles

Almond Cheesecake Bars

Introduction

Chances are you've heard all about low-carb diets: Hollywood celebrities credit their amazing bodies to it, and talk shows and magazines tout it as the quick-fix solution to low energy and weight gain. Well, there's a reason it gets so much publicity: It works! A low-carb diet can help you lose weight, improve your cholesterol, and reduce your risk of heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and cardiovascular disease. On top of that, low-carb diets may also help improve your energy, mood, and ability to concentrate. *Who wouldn't* want all those things?

There's more good news: While other diets may leave you bored with limited choices, starving over tiny portion sizes, and cranky over cardboard-tasting dishes, a low-carb diet doesn't. You still get to eat delicious, flavor-packed foods and enjoy all your favorite dishes—you just need to make a few important adjustments. That's where this book will help you. In the first half of the book, you'll learn what a low-carb diet really means (hint: it's more than just tossing your pasta and bread into the trash), why you should try it, what health benefits you can expect, and how to make the transition as seamlessly as possible. Along the way, this book will teach you the following:

- Easy tips on how to reduce your consumption of carbs
- How to spot which seemingly innocent foods and drinks actually hide a ton of carbs
- Simple cooking tips and ingredient substitutions to make any dish low-carb
- What to buy at the grocery store so you can stock up on healthful, low-carb foods
- How to stick to your low-carb diet when dining out

You'll also get a detailed, 14-day meal plan that takes the guesswork out of adopting a low-carb diet so you can get started right away.

Once you understand the basics, it's time to get cooking! The second half of this book is packed with 125 tasty, easy, and quick low-carb recipes that won't leave you wondering where the flavor went. The best part? All your favorite comfort foods are included. You'll find recipes for these tasty meals and more:

- Breakfast, such as [Baked Eggs in Ham Cups](#) and [Turkey and Apple Breakfast Sausage](#)
- Snacks and appetizers, such as [Hot and Smoky Nuts](#) and [Chicken Skewers with Tomato, Lemon, and Rosemary](#)
- Soups and stews, such as [Broccoli Cheddar Soup](#) and [Jambalaya](#)
- Salads, such as [Caesar Salad with Mushrooms](#) and [Spicy Shrimp and Black Bean Salad](#)
- Side dishes, such as [Classic Coleslaw with a Spicy Twist](#) and [Stuffing with Sausage and Herbs](#)

- Vegetarian entrées, such as [Eggplant Parmesan](#) and [Spaghetti Squash Alfredo](#)
- Fish and seafood, such as [Fish Tacos with Mango Salsa](#) and [Brown Sugar and Mustard Grilled Salmon](#)
- Poultry, pork, and beef, such as [Chicken Paprikash](#), [Slow Cooker Roast Pork Shoulder with German Spices](#), and [Skirt Steak with Garlic-Herb Sauce](#)
- Desserts, such as [Almond Cheesecake Bars](#) and [Chocolate Truffles](#)

Getting hungry? What are you waiting for?! Read on to learn how you can adopt a low-carb diet and whip up some delicious dishes that will leave you feeling healthy and happy about the changes you've made.

A high-angle, close-up photograph of a white ceramic plate with a fork resting on it. The plate is partially visible, showing its curved edge. The fork is positioned diagonally across the lower half of the frame. The background is a neutral, light gray color. The overall aesthetic is clean and minimalist.

CHAPTER ONE

Why Choose a Low-Carb Diet?

Why Choose a Low-Carb Diet?

For anyone who wants to improve his or her health, there are seemingly limitless options out there: South Beach, Atkins, Mediterranean, raw food, and gluten-free diets all vie for your attention. You can cut out all meat, live solely on meat, go fat-free, boost your fat intake—it's enough to make you hit the drive-through. But before you do, take some time to learn about eating low-carb. Unlike fad diets, a low-carb diet is a natural way of eating that improves much more than the number you see on the scale (although, yes, it will do that, too).

What Are Carbohydrates?

To understand what a low-carb diet is, you first have to know what a carbohydrate is. This little bit of Nutrition 101 will help the diet make sense to you.

Basically, all the food you eat is made up of three macronutrients: fats, proteins, and carbohydrates. Fats and proteins are pretty easily identified: foods like butter and oil are fat; meat, fish, legumes, and eggs contain protein. While it is important to watch our intake of fats, our bodies require a certain amount to function properly; fats store energy and help proteins do their jobs. Protein gives you energy, carries nutrients, helps the immune function, helps grow and repair cells, and keeps the brain running smoothly. Carbohydrates, however, can be tougher to spot because they occur in many different types of foods—fruits, vegetables, grains (breads and cereals), dairy products, and sugar. Your body uses carbohydrates to create glucose (a.k.a. blood sugar), which in turn gives you energy and fuels your brain and nervous system. Sounds pretty good, right?

It's a little more complicated than that. Within the broad category of carbohydrates, there are two main types: simple and complex. Simple carbohydrates are generally classified as refined sugars that don't deliver many nutrients but can be high in calories. They are also broken down quickly by your body, resulting in a rush of energy followed by a crash (sound familiar?). Foods containing simple carbohydrates include the following:

- Candy
- Cereal
- Fruit
- Sugar
- Jam and jelly
- Juice
- Milk and milk products

- Soda
 - White flour
-

Milk products and fruit do contain some nutrients. But white flour, sugar, soda, and candy provide mostly empty calories.

On the other hand, complex carbohydrates have a more, well, complex structure and are usually rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Because of this, your body takes longer to digest complex carbohydrates, which makes them a great, long-lasting source of energy. Whenever possible, choose complex carbohydrates over simple ones to help even out your energy levels and contribute to weight loss.

Foods with complex carbohydrates include the following:

- Whole-grain bread
- Oatmeal
- Spinach
- Sweet potatoes
- Beans and lentils

Now that you know what a carbohydrate is, it's time to learn what qualifies as a low-carbohydrate diet.

Fiber is a complex carbohydrate that is healthful for your heart and occurs naturally in a lot of different foods. For every 1,000 calories you consume, aim for 14 grams of dietary fiber (28 grams in a 2,000-calorie diet). To increase how much fiber you eat, up your consumption of beans, whole grains, whole fruits, and vegetables.

What Is a Low-Carb Diet?

In its simplest form, a low-carb diet is exactly what it sounds like: You cut down on the total amount of carbohydrates you consume (both simple and complex). In other words, you substantially reduce your intake of items like breads, pastas, and starchy vegetables.

Why? It isn't that eating carbohydrates is bad; it's simply that most people eat way more carbohydrates than they need to keep their bodies humming along. When you eat too many carbohydrates—more than your body can use for immediate energy—your body stores them for later use or converts them to fat. A moment on the lips really can mean a lifetime on the hips (or upper arms or butt) when it comes to too many carbs. But the opposite also holds true: Cut down on carbohydrates, and your body will start to use the fat you have stored around your body for energy, resulting in weight loss and a trimmer physique.

By adopting a low-carb diet, you will find yourself eating more protein and fat during snacks and meals. That means instead of having noodles or breads as the main component, you'll have more fish, meat, eggs, and low-carb vegetables as the base. This increases the vitamins and

nutrients you're consuming—another benefit of a low-carb diet (more on that soon).

~~Under the umbrella of low-carb diets, many different brand-name diets exist: The Atkins Diet, South Beach Diet, Sugar Busters Diet, and Paleo Diet are all, at their core, low-carb diets.~~

The **Atkins Diet** has four different phases, including the super-restrictive beginning phase when you aren't allowed to eat a single piece of fruit or bread for 2 weeks. You are gradually allowed to add carbohydrates back in via fibrous vegetables. It is generally known as a very strict diet.

The **South Beach Diet**, like Atkins, also has different phases, but focuses on the glycemic index (GI) of different foods. You're allowed some carbohydrates, but only the ones that are low on the index. It also emphasizes small portion sizes and eating only until your hunger goes away—concepts that are important to anyone hoping to lose weight.

The Glycemic Index (GI) is a way of categorizing how fast your blood sugar rises after eating a specific food. The simple carbs that break down quickly in the body have a higher GI level, while complex carbs that take a longer time to digest have a lower GI. Sticking to low-GI foods is another way of avoiding simple carbs.

The **Sugar Busters Diet** shines a spotlight on refined sugar—a simple carbohydrate—and how overindulging in it leads to weight gain. In a nutshell, you aren't allowed to eat any refined sugars, including corn syrup, molasses, and honey. On this diet, you are allowed only around 1,200 calories a day—such a small amount of food that you are practically guaranteed to lose weight (if you can stick with it).

While some low-carb diets have been around for decades, the hottest diet trend right now has actually been around for *thousands* of years. The **Paleo Diet** asks us to eat like our ancestors, the cavemen, ate. Anything that wasn't around 10,000 years ago is out, including carbohydrates like dairy, grains, legumes, and refined sugars.

While all these diets have unique guidelines and eating plans, the one thing they share is an emphasis on cutting back carbohydrates.

What Are the Health Benefits of a Low-Carb Diet?

Now that you understand the basics of a low-carb diet, you're probably wondering about the health benefits of the program and why you should give it a shot. You don't have to be a nutritionist to realize that replacing pizza and lasagna with chicken and salads is going to improve your health, but there's more to it than that.

The biggest benefit to lowering your intake of carbohydrates is weight loss. When you aren't overeating carbs, your body will begin to use stored fat for energy, helping you slim down and stay that way. Dieters who go low-carb have been found to have higher resting metabolisms (the amount of calories you burn at rest), which helps to explain why they don't just lose weight but keep it off in the long term.

You'll also find that you won't need to eat as much on a low-carb diet. All the protein and fat you're digesting will keep you feeling full longer. In other words, you're going to avoid the

afternoon crash that has you crawling to the vending machine for a quick shot of candy. With longer digestion times, you won't get as hungry between meals and snacks. That's why low-carb diets don't feel like other diets. You aren't restricting amounts of food and starving yourself to see a difference in how your jeans fit. You're just making better choices every time you eat.

The combination of weight loss, which benefits your body in countless ways, and the increased consumption of more healthful, nutrient-rich complex carbs has many positive effects. You may also reduce your risk for diabetes (fewer carbs in your diet mean lower levels of blood sugar), high blood pressure, stroke, cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol, and other serious health issues.

Because obesity is such a big issue in America today, researchers continue to study the effects of different diets on weight. When they examine low-carb diets, the findings are encouraging. In fact, a recent review of studies showed that obese participants on a low-carb diet lost weight while improving their waist circumference, blood pressure, triglycerides, blood sugar, heart disease risk factors, and cholesterol levels.

In addition to physical improvements, there are some commonly reported mental health benefits to following a low-carb diet, including a noticeable improvement in energy levels. Since low-carb foods take longer to digest than simple sugars, the energy boost experienced after meals and snacks is prolonged. Increased energy is often accompanied by a better mood and general feeling of well-being (plus better sleep patterns at night). Some people also notice that they don't crave sweets as much as they used to. Once your body goes through detox and gets used to the small amount of sugar you're eating, you'll be satisfied with a lot less of it. Even a piece of fresh fruit will taste like candy!

When you switch to a low-carb diet, the amount of processed sugar you eat is drastically reduced. You have to be a lot more selective about what you eat, cutting way back on sugar-filled sodas, candy, cookies, cakes, and cereals. One surprising benefit is healthier teeth: When sugar constantly hangs out in your mouth, you have a higher risk for cavities and gum disease. Nix the colas, super-sweet salad dressings, and hard candy, for example, and your dental hygiene improves drastically.

Cutting out carbs can also improve the health of people who may not realize they have a gluten sensitivity (gluten is found in carbohydrates such as wheat and other grains). Unlike celiac disease or wheat allergies, which can be quite extreme, a gluten sensitivity results in bloating, diarrhea, bone or joint pain, headaches, and other issues. By adopting a low-carb diet, you automatically reduce your intake of gluten-containing foods, which could lessen any of these symptoms.

Make a simple decision to lower your carbohydrate consumption, and you'll discover the keys to looking and feeling better than ever. You could lose weight, feel more energized, lower your risk for serious health issues, improve your dental hygiene, feel less bloated, and sleep better. By becoming more aware of what you put into your body and how those eating choices affect you, you are well on your way to becoming the healthiest, happiest version of yourself.

Getting Started on a Low-Carb Diet

It's one thing to decide to follow a low-carb diet but quite another to actually do it. In this chapter you'll get all the practical information necessary to get started.

Tips for Successfully Adopting a Low-Carb Diet

A lot of information is swirling around about how to follow a low-carb diet. Some is true; some is not so much. Let's start with the basics: To follow a low-carb diet, you need to reduce the amount of carbohydrates you eat. This means becoming aware of what foods have carbs lurking in them and how much (see [Chapter 3](#)).

Remove the Temptations. Before kicking off your low-carb eating plan, go through your kitchen—refrigerator and pantry—and toss or donate food that will tempt you to go back to your old ways: sugary processed treats, white rice, sweetened drinks, crackers, and chips. You will be much likelier to stick to your game plan if you have only healthful options at home.

Become a Picky Eater. You also need to become pickier about what type of carbohydrates you eat. You can successfully eat a low-carb diet while still filling up on junk food and soft drinks. That isn't the way to go. Remember this rule: Choose complex over simple carbs whenever possible to get the best fuel for your body. Just because you're allowed a certain amount of carbohydrates every day doesn't mean you should get it from nutritionless fare.

So what are the best choices for carbohydrates? Whole grains such as whole wheat, brown rice, bulgur, quinoa, and wild rice as well as legumes such as lentils, black beans, chickpeas, kidney beans, and soybeans. All of these will give you nutritional bang for your buck and fill you up, and they won't spike your blood sugar or lead to a quick energy crash.

Keep a Food Journal. Cutting back doesn't mean cutting out—that's an important distinction. The goal here is not to stop eating all carbohydrates (as you've learned, you need some carbs to get energy and help your body function properly). The goal is to eat less of them. One way to do this is to start keeping a food journal or log. Whenever you eat something, jot down what it is and how many carbohydrates are in it. You can find this information on the food label or online (more on this in [Chapter 4](#)). This way, you'll be able to calculate your total carbohydrate intake day in and day out. Once you get into this practice and learn how many carbs the foods you eat contain, you won't need to keep up with the food diary. But in the beginning it will be really helpful to your success.

Studies have shown that people who keep a food journal lose more weight than those who don't. If you really want to keep a detailed account, include the time of day and how you're feeling at the time you eat. This approach will help you notice emotional eating patterns and pinpoint when you seem to lose the willpower to stick with your goal.

Daily Carb Guidelines

Let's get to the nitty-gritty of low-carb diets and how many carbohydrates you should consume a day.

Typical Recommendations

The Recommended Daily Intake (RDI) of carbs varies quite a bit depending on what source you read. Here's how many grams of carbohydrate three different organizations recommend the average American should consume on a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet (not someone following a low-carb diet):

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA): 225 grams a day

Food and Drug Administration (FDA): 300 grams a day

Institute of Medicine (IOM): 130 grams per day

So what number should you aim for if you want to follow a low-carb diet? Again, that's up for debate. Some diets want you to start by consuming as low as 20 grams of carbohydrates in a day, but that's an incredibly low number that's hard to reach or sustain. Other low-carb diets recommend you consume 50 grams a day or, if you're physically active, up to 100 grams a day. That said, most experts agree that 100 to 150 grams of carbs a day is a relatively good, low-carb target. You'll need to see what works best for you and personalize your daily intake (low enough to see weight loss but high enough that you have energy and aren't starving).

Let's say you're aiming for 75 grams of carbohydrates a day. If you eat three meals and two snacks a day, that might be 15 to 20 grams of carbohydrates per meal and 5 to 10 grams of carbs per snack. That's not a lot! That's why it's important to learn how many carbs are in your favorite foods and keep a food journal so you can jot down your intake as you go along. Fortunately, we have some tips to help keep you on track.

10 Tips to Reduce Your Consumption of Carbs

1. Pay more attention to what you're eating. You've probably spent most of your life eating high-carb foods without really noticing. It's not your fault! The food and restaurant industries have made it super easy to fill up our plates with carbs. Think about it: The rolls in the basket at restaurants, the sandwich bread surrounding your favorite turkey club, the pasta in the salad

bar—carbohydrates are lurking everywhere. If you don't focus on what you're putting into your body, you'll ruin any low-carb plans you may have. So every time you're about to eat, take a moment to figure out what foods on the table are packed with carbohydrates. Choose one carbohydrate to eat and stop there. If you really want the dinner roll, then go ahead and eat it but realize you can't also have pasta or potatoes with your entrée. In time, you'll be able to quickly decide which carb is worth it to you and which you can skip without a care.

2. Become a portion minimizer. You don't want to go through life saying no to every carbohydrate-heavy dish you're offered. Instead, say yes but serve yourself only a small portion. Portion control is probably going to be a big shift for you. A serving size of pasta is $\frac{1}{2}$ cup, not the 2 cups that fill up a plate or bowl. Measure it out (you won't have to every time; just until you recognize what a portion looks like) and stick to that amount. You could also try out these tips to reduce portion size: Instead of a normal-size piece of cake or pie, get just a sliver; instead of the club sandwich, order a regular one and eat it open-faced with only one slice of bread; instead of the super-size fries, get a kid-size order and split it with a friend. Eventually, a few bites of whatever food you want will be enough to cure your craving without affecting your weight loss goals or how you feel.

Remembering how big a portion should be can help you lose weight faster. There are different tricks you can use the next time you're serving yourself: $\frac{1}{2}$ cup is about half the size of a baseball, a bagel should be only the size of a can of tuna, and a slice of bread should be about the size of a CD case.

3. Cut out all processed food. This is really something everybody should be doing, but it's especially important for those who are trying to follow a low-carb diet. Most snack foods and packaged foods are full of carbohydrates and sugar (another carbohydrate, not to mention empty calories) and are low in vitamins, nutrients, and fiber. These include crackers, cookies, cereals, snack cakes, granola bars, and candy, to name just a few.

4. Stay away from starches. It can be tough to remember what veggies are on the "avoid" list when you're eating low-carb. A great rule of thumb is to consider if the vegetable is starchy. Potatoes and corn, for example, are super starchy and also high in carbohydrates. Kale, mushrooms, avocado, and spinach, on the other hand, aren't starchy and are great options.

5. Stop being afraid of fat. In the 1980s, fat-free diets were very popular. People would eat as much as they wanted, as long as it was low-fat. Unfortunately, low-fat items are often high in sugar and calories to make up for the flavor that is lost when the fat is taken away. That fad diet quickly lost its popularity when people noticed they weren't actually losing weight and how horrible everything tasted. So now it's time to realize that fat can be your friend. Fat can help you feel full and satisfied after a meal—like you've really treated yourself. That being said, saturated fats—those found in red meat and dairy products like butter—aren't the best idea. However, there are many great sources of heart-healthy unsaturated fats: Think nuts, extra-virgin olive oil, avocado, and salmon. A lot of the recipes in this book embrace healthy fats and so should you.

- 6. Pack protein in whenever you can.** You are going to be cutting down on carbs, so to replace those foods you should be eating a lot more protein. Protein is hard to overeat, maintains a high energy level for a long time, and is delicious! Every time you plan a meal or snack, start by deciding on your protein. Breakfast should include eggs or some kind of meat; lunch and dinner should focus on fish, poultry, or beef; and between-meal snacks should include nuts or a high-protein dairy to boost your intake.
- 7. Make some simple swaps.** Many traditionally carb-centric dishes can be made in a lighter way but will still retain their flavor. Turn burrito night into lettuce-wrap night. Enjoy your homemade tomato sauce over spaghetti squash instead of spaghetti noodles. And whenever you have the option, swap out white carbs for whole grains—whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pasta, and brown rice. Many low-carb diets suggest thinking of it as a “no white diet”: Many things that are white—potatoes, rice, sugar, flour—should be cut out. (See the handy substitution chart in [Chapter 3](#)).
- 8. Rethink the ratio on your plate.** Most people begin meals by loading their plate with the carb first: the mashed potatoes or pasta or rice that will go under anything else you’re eating. Instead, first load up three-quarters of your plate with veggies and protein, then, in the quarter that’s left over, serve yourself a small portion of the carbohydrate. It’s different than how you’ve done it before, but it will help keep carbs to a minimum while upping your intake of the good stuff.
- 9. Drink only water or other simple beverages.** So many drinks are high in calories, sugar, and carbohydrates. Think about it: Sodas, juices, café mochas, smoothies, sports drinks, bottled iced teas, and lemonade are all crammed with more sugar than you can shake a teaspoon at. By drinking anything besides simple water or tea or coffee, you are sabotaging yourself and making it almost impossible to lower your carb intake. If you need more flavor, try infusing your water with fruit or cucumber. Or go with seltzer—the bubbles make it seem more fun than straight-from-the-tap water and give you the sense that you’re treating yourself. You can even make your own iced tea without any added sugar and keep a pitcher in the fridge to reach for whenever you’re craving it.
- 10. Allow yourself a cheat every now and then.** Go ahead and occasionally cheat, to satisfy that nagging craving. But the keys to cheating is that you don’t do it too often, you choose smartly, you have a sensibly small portion, and you savor every single bite. You aren’t allowed to cheat and have a big bowl of ice cream every night. But, if you happen to be on vacation and walk by an ice-cream shop with incredible premium flavors, get a small kid-size scoop, sit down, and slowly relish each spoonful (but skip the sugar cone). With this approach, you won’t feel guilty afterward because you know you’re allowed to indulge on occasion without undoing all your hard work.

Identifying High- and Low-Carb Foods

It's almost impossible to eat a low-carb diet if you have no idea which foods are high in carbs and which are low—and it's not quite as easy to tell the difference as you might imagine. Some foods you'd think would get the green light are actually best avoided, and vice versa. In this chapter you'll learn where your favorite foods fall on the carb spectrum, which will help you make better choices.

Everyday Foods and Beverages High in Carbs

Consider this the “avoid whenever possible” section. These foods and beverages are fine in small portions as part of a dish (and some offer essential nutrients, fiber, and vitamins), but don't create an entire meal out of them.

- 1. Grains.** When most people hear the word *carbohydrate*, they think grains. That's for good reason. One slice of bread has around 14 grams of carbs (which means that when you slap two slices down on a plate to make a sandwich, you're already hitting 28 grams). It's tough to find bread items that aren't carb bombs. Just ate a bagel? You've downed up to 60 grams of carbs (without cream cheese or jam spread on top). Want some cereal? One cup of Shredded Wheat has 39 grams of carbs. One cup of Cheerios contains 20 grams of carbs. Muffins, pancakes, hamburger buns, and croissants are all similarly high in carbs. If you do eat a bread item, and you will from time to time, always opt for something made with whole grains to get as much fiber as possible. And remember that something doesn't have to be a bread product to be made from grain. Flour comes from wheat, so anything made with flour, such as pasta and pizza dough, is also high in carbs. Also watch out for grains other than wheat, like rice (1 cup has 45 grams of carbs), barley (1 cup has 135 grams of carbs), and oats (1 cup has 103 grams of carbs).
- 2. Sweetened foods.** Granulated sugar (you know, the kind you stir into coffee or mix into cookie batter) is 100 percent carbohydrates. The more sugary the thing is that you're putting in your mouth, the greater the carb load it carries. The worst of the worst are hard candies and gummy candies: They're made almost entirely from sugar, which means they're almost pure carbohydrates. But all other sweets—candies, cakes, puddings, and cookies—get a red flag as well. You can still have them every now and then (come on, this is life after all), but they need to be something you rarely splurge on as opposed to being something you indulge in once a day (or more often).
- 3. Drinks.** It's not just what you eat that you need to mind. Drinks can be just as potent a source of

carbs, sometimes even more so. Just 1 cup of Gatorade (and who has only 1 cup?) has 15 grams of carbs; 1 cup of orange juice has 30 grams; and a can of soda has 39 grams. Go for a fountain soft drink and you're looking at 45 grams of carbs or more! And don't forget about booze. While it's totally fine to have an alcoholic drink every now and then, imbibing too often can ruin your low-carb goals. Sweet wines can contain a lot of carbs from the grapes; mixers like sodas and juices are typically carb-laden; and beers are made out of grains and may contain up to 20 grams of carbs per can (12 fluid ounces).

As opposed to regular sodas, diet sodas contain almost no carbs because they use artificial sweeteners. That said, researchers and nutritionists are torn on whether or not diet soda is a smart choice nutritionally. Some studies have shown that even people who drink diet sodas are more likely to be overweight than those who skip soda altogether.

4. Starchy vegetables. A little less obvious but just as important to watch are starchy vegetables. Remember, starches are complex carbohydrates that our bodies turn into sugar during digestion. A baked potato, without a single topping, can have as much as 49 grams of carbs per serving. French fries, hash browns, potato chips—all are made up almost exclusively of potatoes and all are packing tons of carbohydrates. Other starchy vegetables you should limit include sweet potatoes, yams, corn (1 cup of kernels has 36 grams of carbs), peas, and all the different kinds of squash like acorn and butternut. Compared to potatoes, however, squash has fewer carbs, so if you had to pick one from this list, go with the squash (plus you'll get lots of great nutrients from the squash).

5. Fruit. Because of the load of natural sugars they contain, fruit includes some big carb offenders. The sweetest varieties—dates (one has 18 grams of carbs), cherries (1 cup has 12.5 grams of carbs), grapes (1 cup has 27 grams of carbs), mangoes (1 cup has almost 25 grams of carbs), pears (one has 27 grams of carbs), and pineapple (1 cup has 21 grams of carbs)—are also the worst for someone on a low-carb diet. Watch out, too, for bananas, which can be as starchy and carb-laden as a potato: A medium banana can have as much as 27 grams. Be even more careful when it comes to dried fruit; the concentrated sugars and ease of bingeing due to their small size make raisins and other dried fruits super-high-carb items.

Sneaky Carbs

Now that we've reviewed which obvious foods and drinks are high in carbohydrates, it's time to discover some surprising places carbs are lurking.

1. Cooked beans. While these are often thought of as being high in protein, they are also high in carbohydrates: 1 cup of great Northern beans clocks in at 37 grams of carbs; 1 cup of black beans has 40 grams; 1 cup of cannellini has 46 grams; and 1 cup of lentils is up there at 40 grams.

2. Dairy products. It's natural for most people to hear *dairy* and think protein and calcium, but

milk also has a lot of naturally occurring sugars that lead to a high carbohydrate count. While different types of milk (whole versus skim) have slightly different carb loads, a good rule of thumb is that 1 cup of milk has about 11.5 grams of carbohydrates. Dairy products such as yogurt also have a bit of carbs, but it's often the added sugar that's the bigger culprit.

3. Low-fat foods. Low-fat products are often billed as health foods, but surprisingly they are often high-carb items. When companies remove the fat from processed fare like muffins, cookies, and crackers, they typically add loads of sugar to make the end product taste better. If you're going to eat something high in carbs, go with the full-fat version and you'll at least feel satisfied afterward.

4. Sauces and dressings. Most of these, like barbecue sauce, bottled salad dressings, marinades, and ketchup, are loaded with sugar and high-fructose corn syrup and, therefore, loaded with carbs.

Low-Carb Foods and Beverages

Now some good news: While it seems as if there are a lot of foods high in carbohydrates, there are just as many that are low in carbohydrates. Anybody taking on a low-carb diet has loads of options. Focus on what you can have instead of what you can't, and you'll never have bored taste buds.

1. Meat and seafood. This is probably the biggest category of low-carb foods. Beef, chicken, pork, and seafood are so high in protein, with a little fat mixed in, that there's little room for carbs. Just watch out how you prepare them. *Do* grill, bake, and roast. *Don't* bread them (like fried chicken) or dunk them in sugary sauces like honey mustard or barbecue sauce. Also keep in mind that processed deli meats like ham, hot dogs, and sausages might have added sugar in them, so check the nutrition label.

2. Nonstarchy vegetables. Eat as many nonstarchy vegetables as you'd like! The list includes all kinds of greens (lettuces, spinach, chard, kale, radicchio, endive, etc.), sprouts, celery, radishes, mushrooms, avocado, asparagus, cucumbers, green beans, fennel, cauliflower, broccoli, pepper squash (in moderation), Brussels sprouts, tomatoes, artichokes, and herbs. You have tons of options, so there's no need to feel stuck in a veggie rut.

3. Nuts and seeds. Lower in carbs, nuts and seeds are good for snacking (just watch your portion size—you should limit yourself to a small handful because they are high in fat), at mealtime (nut butters are delicious), and baking (some nuts can be turned into flour). A 1-ounce handful of almonds has only 2.7 grams of carbs; 1 ounce hazelnuts has 4.7 grams; 1 ounce macadamia nuts, 4 grams; 1 ounce peanuts, 4.5 grams; and 1 ounce pecans, 3.9 grams. To top it off, nuts are super filling and contain heart-healthy unsaturated fats.

4. Lower-carb beverage options. When it comes to beverages, things get a little trickier. You aren't stuck with just water and club soda (although, honestly, plain water should make up the majority of your beverage consumption). If you want iced tea, make it yourself and don't add any sugar (throw in some fresh mint leaves while it's cooling and you'll get the flavor boost you crave). You can also go sugar-free with drink mixes such as the kind made by Crystal Light.

Coffee and hot tea drinkers can rejoice! As long as you don't dump loads of sugar or honey into your drink or sip on something like a mocha, you are free and clear to enjoy. As for alcohol, if you're choosing wine, go with red since it's packed with antioxidants and has only 3 to 5 grams of carbs per 100-gram glass (white wine has the same carb amount, there are just fewer studies showing its health benefits). If you like to sip on a little whiskey every now and then or mix scotch with some club soda, you can relax knowing that pure liquor is actually carb-free—it's the mixers you need to worry about.

Many studies have shown health benefits to having one alcoholic drink a day. Drinking alcohol in moderation can reduce your risk of developing heart disease, stroke, gallstones, and diabetes. The key is to stick to one glass a day (and no, that doesn't mean you can abstain all week and have seven drinks on Saturday night).

Low-Carb Substitutes

One of the smartest strategies for sticking to a low-carb diet is to have some go-to substitutions. That way you can enjoy your favorite dishes with a few swaps and still hit your carbohydrate goal for the day. Just use this handy chart and you'll keep your stomach happy *and* your abs flat.

Low-Carb Substitutions

Instead of ...

Use ...

Milk, 2% (11.5 grams of carbs per 1 cup)

Unsweetened soy milk (2 to 5 grams of carbs per 1 cup)

White flour (95 grams of carbs per 1 cup)

- ✓ Almond flour (8 grams of carbs per 1 cup)
 - ✓ Coconut flour (80 grams of carbs per 1 cup, but extremely high in fiber)
 - ✓ Flaxseed meal (20 grams of carbs per 1 cup)
- (Unfortunately, you can't just swap them one for one in your regular recipe, but there are tons of resources out there for baked goods using low-carb alternatives.)

White sandwich bread (12 grams of carbs per

- ✓ Low-carb tortillas (they're packed with so much fiber, the net carb count is only 3 to 6

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