

# Low Carb Diets

**Summary:** While many people experience initial success on a low carb diet, there is ongoing debate among health experts about the overall healthfulness of this approach, and research on the long-term effects of low-carbohydrate diets is still evolving. According to current evidence, as a health coach, I cannot recommend a very low carb diet, which is characterized by daily carbohydrate intake of less than 50 grams (equivalent to 200 calories). The lowest amount of carbohydrates I would recommend is 130 grams per day (equivalent to 500 calories). However, I would caution against this level of restriction for individuals who engage in intense exercise or who are trying to build muscle. That being said, reducing carbohydrate intake can be a useful strategy for weight loss, but it is important to avoid drastic changes. Instead, when limiting carbohydrates, it is recommended to start by reducing refined carbs such as white bread, rice, pasta, and added sugar. Recent studies have found that a moderate reduction in carbohydrate intake can lead to significant improvements in weight loss and metabolic health, particularly when the focus is on whole food sources of carbohydrates, such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

While some studies suggest that low-carbohydrate diets may be beneficial for weight loss and certain health conditions, there are also concerns about potential risks associated with this dietary pattern.

Here are some studies and resources that provide insight into the potential health benefits and risks of low-carbohydrate diets:

- A 2013 systematic review and meta-analysis published in the British Journal of Nutrition concluded that low-carbohydrate diets can lead to significant improvements in weight loss, blood glucose control, and blood lipid levels.
- A 2014 study published in the Annals of Internal Medicine found that a low-carbohydrate diet improved glycemic control and lipid profiles in obese adults with type 2 diabetes.
- A 2018 study published in the Lancet Public Health found that both low-carbohydrate and high-carbohydrate diets were associated with increased mortality risk, while moderate carbohydrate intake was associated with lower mortality risk.
- A 2019 study published in the Journal of the American College of Cardiology found that low-carbohydrate diets were associated with increased mortality risk, particularly when the low-carbohydrate diet was high in animal protein and fat.
- The American Heart Association (AHA) and the American College of Cardiology (ACC) recommend a diet that emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and healthy fats, and caution against a high intake of saturated fat, which is common in many low-carbohydrate diets.
- The US News and World Report 2021 Best Diets rankings placed low-carbohydrate diets in the middle of the pack in terms of overall healthfulness, with some low-carbohydrate diets ranking higher than others.
- A 2019 study published in The Lancet Public Health also found that a low-carbohydrate diet was associated with increased mortality risk, particularly when carbohydrates were replaced with animal-based protein and fat.
- A 2020 review published in the Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics found that while low-carbohydrate diets may be effective for short-term weight loss and glycemic control in individuals with diabetes, there is insufficient evidence to support their use as a long-term dietary approach.
- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025 recommends that carbohydrates should make up 45-65% of daily caloric intake, with an emphasis on consuming nutrient-dense carbohydrate sources such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- The American Heart Association recommends that adults consume at least 130 grams of carbohydrates per day, the minimum amount needed to fuel the brain and other vital organs.
- A very low-carbohydrate ketogenic diet, which typically restricts carbohydrates to 20-50 grams per day, may be used therapeutically in some individuals with certain health conditions, such as epilepsy or certain metabolic disorders, but should be done under medical supervision.

In summary, while low-carbohydrate diets may be effective for short-term weight loss and certain health conditions, there are concerns about potential risks associated with this dietary pattern, particularly when carbohydrates are replaced with animal-based protein and fat. It is generally recommended that carbohydrates make up at least 45-65% of daily caloric intake, with an emphasis on nutrient-dense carbohydrate sources. A very low-carbohydrate ketogenic diet may be used therapeutically in certain individuals, but should be done under medical supervision. Overall, while some individuals may find success with a moderate low-carb diet, it may not be sustainable or appropriate for everyone. Adherence to any dietary pattern can be challenging, and individualized support and guidance may be necessary for long-term success.