

Low Carb Diets

For weight loss for adults including those with prediabetes and diabetes.

Overview

Low carbohydrate (carb) diets have become popular for weight loss and for improving glycaemic control in type 2 diabetes. Before deciding to follow a low carb diet it is important that you are aware of the supporting evidence, and if you have a medical condition you are advised to seek advice from a dietitian. If you have type 2 diabetes, you may need to reduce some medication such as insulin or sulfonylureas to avoid hypoglycaemia, and this should be done under medical supervision.

Are low carb diets more effective than other diets?

The evidence shows that low carb diets are effective for both weight loss and improving glycaemic control in type 2 diabetes, but that they are no more effective than many other diets. There is no single diet that suits everyone, and it is advised that you choose a diet that fits with your lifestyle, has minimum impact on your quality of life, and which you feel you can maintain over the long-term. It is also important that you choose a diet that meets your nutritional needs.

Are low carb diets safe?

Studies of low carbohydrate diets have shown that they are safe over the short-term (up to one year). There is very little information about safety over the longer term and there are some concerns about dietary changes with low carb diets such as eating less fibre, more red and processed meat and more saturated fat. This may increase the risk of heart disease, some cancers and change the bacteria in the gut, but few studies have investigated this, so it is challenging to draw any firm conclusions.



Ketogenic diets should not be followed by women who are pregnant.

How much carbohydrate can I eat on a low carb diet?

There are different categories of low carb diets as shown in the table below. Overall, low carb diets are usually defined as those that provide less than 130g of carbs each day.

Type of low carb diet	Carbohydrate (g/day)
Very low carb (ketogenic)	20 - 50
Low carb	50 - 130
Moderate carb	130 - 220
High carb	More than 225

How can I follow a low carb diet?

It is recommended that you plan your diet to make sure that you are including all the nutrients that your body needs and a dietitian can help with this. Low carb diets advise limiting foods that contain carbohydrate.

Which foods contain carbs?

Sugary and starchy carbohydrate foods including sugar, sweets, chocolate, biscuits, cakes, puddings, desserts, breakfast cereal, bread, potatoes, pasta, rice, noodles, savoury snacks and most take-away and convenience foods all contain carbs and are generally avoided on a low carb diet.

There are other foods containing natural carbohydrate such as milk, natural yoghurt, fruit, green leafy vegetables and salad that can be included. Depending on the extent of carb restriction, some people also include pulses such as dried peas and beans.

What can I eat?

Base your diet on fresh, unprocessed foods where possible and include plenty of low carb vegetables (such as green veg, mushrooms, courgettes) and salad, some fruit, some dairy foods and lean meat, poultry, fish and eggs. Choose healthier fats such as olive or rapeseed oil for cooking and salad dressings.

Meal suggestions 50 - 130g carbohydrate diet

Daily allowance: ½pt of semi-skimmed milk for tea or coffee

Breakfast:

- ✓ Boiled, poached or scrambled eggs served with grilled tomatoes and mushrooms
- ✓ Omelette stuffed with spinach or mushrooms
- ✓ Smoothie made with berries, natural yoghurt and milk
- ✓ Mixed berries or stewed fruit (without sugar) with natural yoghurt
- ✓ Poached smoked haddock with spinach and grilled tomatoes
- ✓ Grilled turkey bacon with tomatoes and mushrooms

Mid-day or light meal:

- ✓ Tuna salad niçoise followed by berries and natural yoghurt
- ✓ Greek salad followed by a small apple
- ✓ Egg-crust pizza followed by mixed fruit salad
- ✓ Chick pea salad followed by mixed berries
- ✓ Ratatouille with poached eggs followed by a small orange
- ✓ Cauliflower or broccoli cheese followed by a peach or nectarine

Evening or main meal (main course and a pudding):

- ✓ Grilled, steamed or oven-baked fish with at least 2 portions of vegetables
- ✓ Chicken, tuna, cottage cheese or eggs with a large salad
- ✓ Roast or grilled lean meat, or vegetarian option (Quorn™, tofu, pulses) with at least 2 portions of vegetables
- ✓ Casserole of lean meat, poultry or fish made with at least 2 portions of low carb vegetables

Puddings:

- ✓ Sugar free jelly
- ✓ Fruit mousses made with natural yoghurt, fresh fruit, eggs, gelatine and artificial sweetener (optional)
- ✓ 6 pieces/20g 85% dark chocolate
- ✓ Stewed fruit with artificial sweetener (optional)
- ✓ Fresh fruit
- ✓ Fresh fruit with natural yoghurt

What resources are available for help?

Books

Good food: Low carb cooking

BBC Books, Ebury 2013

Carbs and Cals

World of Foods 2016

(This book only provides information about the carb content of foods, it does not recommend a strategy for carb intake)

Online

NHS approved app

A low carb program app has been approved by the NHS. It requires a subscription and is available from: <https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/low-carb-program/>

Diabetes UK low carb diets

<https://www.diabetes.org.uk/guide-to-diabetes/enjoy-food/eating-with-diabetes/meal-plans-/low-carb>