

HealthTalk: Low-Fat v. Low-Carb Diets

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Q: Do we know yet which diet – low-fat or low-carb – produces better weight loss results?

A: In a large two-year trial comparing results of low-carbohydrate and low-fat diets, researchers concluded that choosing between these approaches may not matter for weight loss as much as finding ways that work for you to decrease calorie consumption and to keep yourself on track. This finding is similar to two earlier studies looking at weight loss at one year. In the two-year trial, both groups achieved an 11 percent weight loss at one year, which slid to a 7 percent loss (about 15 pounds) at two years, still enough to make a significant difference in risk of diabetes and high blood pressure. This trial, published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*, included only obese adults (not just a little overweight) who had no heart disease or diabetes. HDL (“good”) cholesterol increased with weight loss in both diets, but those on the low-carbohydrate diet had almost double the increase as those cutting fat, and their blood pressure improved a bit more. However, the low-fat group showed greater drop in LDL (“bad”) cholesterol, and for people with heart disease (not included in this study), that could be very important. You’re looking for changes you can continue, so consider what type of foods are most important to you, but recognize that any kind of weight loss plan does require some change in the eating habits that are keeping you overweight. Regardless of your choice, note that people in this study got group support to learn behavioral techniques to change eating habits. This occurred weekly for five months, followed by sessions every other week for another five months, and then monthly for over a year. However you choose to approach the goal of reducing calorie consumption, find ways to make healthy eating delicious, satisfying and realistic so you’ll want to continue. You don’t need to choose one extreme or the other.

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The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) is the cancer charity that fosters research on the relationship of nutrition, physical activity and weight management to cancer risk, interprets the scientific literature and educates the public about the results. It has contributed more than \$91 million for innovative research conducted at universities, hospitals and research centers across the country. AICR has published two landmark reports that interpret the accumulated research in the field, and is committed to a process of continuous review. AICR also provides a wide range of educational programs to help millions of Americans learn to make dietary changes for lower cancer risk. Its award-winning New American Plate program is presented in brochures, seminars and on its website, www.aicr.org. AICR is part of the global network of charities that are dedicated to the prevention of cancer. The WCRF global network is led and unified by WCRF International, a membership association which operates as the umbrella organization for the network. The other charities in the WCRF network are World Cancer Research Fund in the UK (www.wcrf-uk.org); Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds in the Netherlands (www.wcrf-nl.org); World Cancer Research Fund Hong Kong (www.wcrf-hk.org); and Fonds Mondial de Recherche contre le Cancer in France (www.fmrc.fr).