

Chapter 1

Mapping Out Low-Carb Dieting

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding low-carb dieting
- ▶ Choosing the best carbs for your body
- ▶ Maintaining a low-carb lifestyle

Eating in America has changed. Americans eat out more frequently, eat larger portions of food, and eat more foods with little resemblance to their form in nature. As a result, more Americans than ever are overweight and struggling to find a weight-loss plan that lets them lose the extra pounds.

In this chapter, I map out a low-carb eating plan that is healthy *and* satisfying. I show you how to remove *refined carbohydrates* (carbohydrates with lots of sugar and very little fiber) from your diet, to make your diet healthier. By improving the quality of the carbohydrates you eat, and by controlling your daily intake of starchy carbs (like breads, pasta, and starchy vegetables), you'll lose weight and experience many other healthy benefits including increased energy, improved mood, and better sleeping.

To Eat Low-Carb or Low-Fat? That Is the Question

Currently, the debate rages between proponents of low-fat and low-carb diets. I'm sure you've heard the sound byte, "Fat makes you fat." Most Americans have gotten the low-fat dieting message. In fact, on average, Americans have reduced the percentage of fat in their diet to 33 percent of the calories they consume, as recommend by the low-fat experts. But even so, more than half of adult Americans are overweight. Our overall percentage of calories from fat went down, primarily because the actual number of calories we eat has gone up. We are eating more food than ever. Carbohydrate has replaced much of the fat in the American diet — and the increased food intake means an increased carbohydrate intake. This increased carbohydrate intake is largely sugars, sweeteners, and processed flour. The increase in carbohydrate from these refined sources has had a direct impact on the health (and waistlines) of Americans.

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In working with overweight patients at Texas Tech Medical Center, I found a low-carb eating plan approach more effective than a low-fat diet approach. Patients watching their fat intake were eating a lot of fat-free food products that were not any healthier than the fat they had been eating.

What this diet is about

If you've looked into low-carb diets, you've probably found more than a few that require you to banish carbs from your diet entirely. And if you like carbs the way most people do, you've probably thrown down those books with a mixture of fear and frustration. Don't worry — the guidelines I give you in this book do *not* ask you to remove carbs from your diet completely. Instead, I want to get you thinking about the quality of the foods you consume, rather than the number of carb grams those foods contain. Rest assured that you will be allowed enough carb grams for good health, but I will do most of the counting for you. All you will need to do is choose delicious foods. For more details about this, turn to Chapter 2.



This is not an “eat-all-the-fat-and-protein-you-can-possibly-consume” diet. It's really focused on enjoying *whole or unprocessed foods* and enjoying the healthy side effects, including having more energy, stabilizing your blood-sugar levels, losing weight, and improving your self-confidence. (Whole foods are fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, nuts, and seeds that have not been processed to remove vitamins, minerals, fiber, and so on. They are foods that are sold to consumers in close to the same state that nature provided them.)

Most foods contain some carbohydrates. Even an 8-ounce glass of skim milk contains 12 grams of carbs. A cup of broccoli contains 8 carb grams. And yet, both milk and broccoli are packed full of other nutritional benefits, including vitamins, nutrients, fiber, and phytochemicals. If you strictly limit the number of carb grams in your diet without considering the *quality* of the carbs you eat, you'll be missing out on some key foods that will enhance your overall good health.



On this low-carb plan, you'll be limited to five carbohydrate servings a day, but many foods that contain carbohydrates are absolutely *free* (which on this diet means you can have as many of them as you want, without counting them toward your daily carb allowance). Check out Chapters 5 and 6 for the full scoop on which carbs fall into which categories, but here are some quick tips on which foods to focus your attention on and which to pass by:

- ✓ **Don't be afraid of fruit.** Fruit does contain carbohydrates, but the carbs in fruit give it a delicious *natural* sweetness, which is partnered with a ton of vitamins, fiber, and relatively few calories. Increasing your fruit intake is a great way to help you wean yourself off *refined sugars* (refined

sugars are sugars like table sugar and high-fructose corn syrup that are added to processed foods). Fruits make a great dessert option and, because they come pre-portioned in their own natural package, they're a great choice for grab-and-go snacks. On this diet plan, almost all fruits are *free* (meaning you can eat as many of them as you like). For more on free foods (and which fruits *aren't* free), see Chapter 5.

- ✓ **Look at leafy green and non-starchy vegetables.** Leafy greens, like spinach, watercress, cabbage, and romaine lettuce, and non-starchy vegetables, like green beans, broccoli, carrots, and tomatoes, come in an almost limitless variety. You can further vary your diet by trying new preparations of old favorites and partnering them with new choices. Check out some great recipes for salads and other greens in Chapter 5.
- ✓ **Remove refined sugars from your life.** Refined sugars provide calories, but lack vitamins, minerals, and fiber. The amount of refined sugar in the American diet is a disastrous, but fairly recent, development. Watch out for hidden sugars in breads, lunch meat, and salad dressings. Pay attention to the not-hidden sugars in non-diet sodas, cookies, and candy. For more on reducing the amount of sugar in your diet, see Chapter 6.

And, for those five carbohydrate servings you're allowed to eat each day, choose the following:

- ✓ **Check out legumes.** *Legumes* (leh-GOOMS) are foods like peas, beans, and peanuts. They are nutritional powerhouses that add fiber to your diet, are naturally low in fat, are a great source of protein, and are very inexpensive. Look for several varieties at your market including canned, dried, and fresh. Legumes make great additions to salads, serve as excellent side dishes, and make healthy delicious entrees in their own right. Look for great recipes for legumes throughout Parts II and III of this book.
- ✓ **Choose whole grains whenever possible.** Look for *whole grains* (grains that still have their bran and nutrients intact) as the first ingredient on a food nutrition label's ingredients list. Items made from whole grains tend to be higher in fiber, lower in sugar, and have a stabilizing affect on blood sugar levels compared to their refined-grain counterparts. For more on the benefits of fiber and whole grains, take a look at Chapter 6.
- ✓ **Introduce more soy products into your diet.** Soy foods contain both carbs and protein, making them off-limits on many low-carb eating plans. Not so with my plan. In fact, if you're a vegetarian, you can substitute soy products for lean proteins in your diet and still get many of the nutritional benefits this plan has to offer. Regardless of whether you're a vegetarian, adding more soy to your diet can offer tremendous health benefits, including a reduced risk of several types of cancer and heart disease, as well as more-balanced hormone levels. Check out Chapter 6 for more good news about soy products.

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Whether low-carb eating is right for you

Take a good look at Chapter 4 to determine if low-carb dieting is right for you. But for now, the following are *all* good reasons to follow this low-carb plan:

- ✓ If your personal health history includes the precursors to diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease
- ✓ If you're concerned about stabilizing your blood sugar levels
- ✓ If you're tired of the way convenience foods and prepackaged, sugar-laden foods make you feel
- ✓ If your Body Mass Index (BMI) is 30 or above (turn to Appendix A to determine your BMI)



Be sure to check with your personal healthcare practitioner before beginning any exercise or diet regimen.

Discovering Whole Foods

The most important element of the eating plan I cover in this book is the introduction of whole foods into your diet. A *whole food* is any food that's not refined or processed. Fresh, frozen, or canned fruits and vegetables are whole foods; French fries are not. A sirloin steak is a whole food; a breaded veal cutlet is not. Whole-grain bread is a whole food; white bread is not. Apple juice is a whole food; a fruit roll-up is not. A baked potato is a whole food; potato chips are not.



The more refined a food is, the fewer vitamins and nutrients and the less fiber the food has. If you see a food that's refined but has been fortified with vitamins and minerals, like sugary breakfast cereal, be wary. These vitamins aren't as easily used by your body for all of its vital processes as their naturally occurring counterparts. And 99 times out of 100, the food contains more sugar than your body needs.

Check out Part II for the skinny on using whole foods to their best dietary advantage.

Living the Low-Carb Way

Low-carb dieting will become second nature to you quickly. The key to your success is planning. Plan your meals and plan your shopping trips to fit with your low-carb lifestyle. You can minimize impulse buys by having a plan to stick to.



Be aware of the layout of your grocery store. Food manufacturers want to lure you toward the center aisles of the grocery store where the shelves are stocked with expensive prepared dinners and other refined foods. Stick to the perimeter of the grocery store for most whole-food choices (such as fresh produce, low-fat dairy products, and lean meats). When you do take the plunge into the center aisles for dried beans, canned vegetables, or whole oats, avoid the temptation to toss prepackaged dinner helpers, chips, cookies, or sugary cereals into your cart. For more shopping tips, take a look at Chapter 9.

With a little effort, you'll be able to navigate your way around a low-carb kitchen. My pantry tends to be full of canned whole veggies rather than canned soup, which typically contains more sodium and modified food starch than vegetables. I use fresh or frozen beef, canned beans, and tomatoes to make my own chili instead of buying premade canned chili. Find your own shortcuts to make your life easier *and* low-carb friendly.



When dining out, don't be afraid to ask for substitutions. If your steak comes with French fries, ask for an extra side of veggies instead. If the pasta special sounds very tempting, the chef can likely make it for you without the pasta. Just think of that chunky seafood in a hearty marinara sauce — it's fantastic without the white pasta. Most restaurants, even fast-food restaurants, have a house or green salad that's a great addition to any meal and totally free on this eating plan. Just get your dressing on the side, so you don't eat unwanted fat and calories. For more tips on dining out, skip ahead to Chapter 13.

Beyond the Scale: Identifying Other Factors for Overall Health

For most people, weight loss and dieting go hand in hand. In fact, when you hear someone say, "I'm on a diet," it usually means, "I'm trying to lose weight." But the word *diet* (coming from the Latin *dieta*, or "daily regimen") can also refer simply to the food you eat day in and day out. I want to change your daily food plan for the rest of your life, not just help you lose weight now. So, considering factors other than a number on the scale is important when you're charting your progress.



Lowering your Body Mass Index (BMI), or body fat percentage, by as few as two points can have a profoundly positive effect on your overall health. Check out Chapter 3 and Appendix A for details.



Your body shape, genetics, and age have as much to do with your physical appearance as your weight. So set realistic expectations for what you expect your body to look like. An unrealistic self-image can be devastating to your health and self-esteem. For more details, take a look at Chapter 15.

Exercise and low-carb dieting: Your partners in fitness

Exercise isn't just a necessary part of life, it's fun! With so many different forms of exercise available, you're sure to find one that matches your interests and lifestyle. You don't have to run out and buy Spandex, join a gym, and attend a Pilates class this week. Just pulling weeds in the garden or mowing the lawn can get your heart pumping. Walk around the block with your dog. Find a friend to walk with you during your lunch break. Volunteer to coach a Little League team in the sport of your choice. Anything that gets you moving is a great addition to your lifestyle.



The effects of exercise are cumulative, which means that you don't have to get your 30 minutes a day in one shot. You can take a 15-minute walk around the block in the morning, and another 15-minute walk after dinner.

Daily exercise stabilizes your blood sugar levels, improves your cardiovascular health, increases your strength and stamina, and helps you get a better night of sleep. You may feel more tired immediately after beginning a new exercise program, but you should quickly enjoy increased energy levels, as well as an improved mood because of the *endorphins* running rampant in your bloodstream.



Endorphins are chemical signals in your blood that act like your body's own version of morphine or painkillers. Production of endorphins in the body is linked to increased exercise and produces a feeling of euphoria, sometimes labeled as *runner's high* in athletes. After exercise, the endorphins improve your sense of well-being.

The more you exercise, the more lean muscle you develop. And the more lean muscle you develop, the higher your resting *metabolism*. (Your metabolism is sort of your internal rhythm, or the rate at which you burn calories when completely at rest.) With a higher resting metabolism, you burn more calories while you're sleeping, working at your desk, or even just breathing. How's that for efficiency?

Exploring vitamins and supplements

On the Whole Foods Eating Plan, you're encouraged to take in most of your vitamins and minerals through the whole foods that you consume. However, a few important exceptions may exist. If you're at risk for osteoporosis, you'll want to calculate your calcium intake, and if it doesn't meet your daily need, add a calcium supplement to your daily regimen. Certain health conditions



and certain stages in life may make considering a vitamin or mineral supplement appropriate as well. Antioxidant nutrients like vitamins C, E, and beta-carotene and the minerals zinc, copper, selenium, and manganese may help lower your risk of disease and the ravages of aging. New guidelines for supplements and information on upper limits can help you to know the amounts to take and still stay within safe levels.

For more on incorporating vitamins and supplements into your low-carb lifestyle, take a look at Chapter 14 and Appendix D.

Maintaining Your Low-Carb Lifestyle

As with making any long-term change to your diet, the key to enjoying the ultimate benefits of your low-carb lifestyle is sticking with the plan. Part V is loaded with tips and tricks to help you set yourself up to succeed.

Making the commitment

The first step in making the low-carb commitment is mental or psychological. Customize your food habits to meet the demands of your lifestyle and your low-carb diet. If you can get your family, roommates, or other housemates to follow the diet with you, you'll definitely have a better shot at success, because you can completely remove tempting foods and sweets from your cabinets and fridge. But don't stress if others aren't interested in the plan. You can still cook for the whole family with the plan and adjust your own portion sizes to coincide with it. You'll just need to be careful not to indulge in cookies or snacks. For more on getting (and staying) committed to the plan, check out Chapters 16 and 17.

Planning ahead

Let your lifestyle help determine your food-plan strategy. If you know that you have no time in the mornings, prepare your healthy breakfast and lunch the night before. Plan your meals before you're hungry. Making healthy choices is much more difficult when you're hungry and refined foods are handy.



The rise of prepackaged, convenience foods has increased the amount of refined sugar in the American diet, but your busy schedule doesn't have to be a barrier to healthy eating. Keep healthy snacks on hand in snack-size resealable plastic bags for easy treats. You'll eliminate the urge to grab cookies, chips, and crackers.

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Cook meals in quantity. Roast a large turkey or ham for lots of leftovers and soups or salads. Double entree sizes so you can eat one and freeze one for later. Buy reusable plastic containers that go from freezer to microwave for your own frozen lunch entrees. For more planning tips, check out Chapters 10 and 17.

Picking yourself up when you fall

I wish I could say that no one ever slips up on this plan, that no one ever gives in to temptation and succumbs to that extra baked potato or slice of cake. But the fact is giving in to temptation is part of life. You're human and, therefore, you aren't perfect. However, don't beat up on yourself when you slip up, and more importantly, don't use it as an excuse to throw all your progress out the window. So you had a piece of cake and didn't save any carb choices for it? Analyze what went wrong in your plan and resolve to have a better day tomorrow. These small setbacks can be the gateway to long-term success. If you can learn from them and make better choices in the same situation next time, you can have better overall health and weight control. For specifics on getting it together (again), take a look at Chapter 18.