

Diet Book Critique

Title:

Dr. Atkins New Diet Revolution (completely updated) by Robert C. Atkins MD

Rationale:

This diet book claims that controlling carbohydrate intakes is an effective way to lose weight without compromising nutritional status. The book claims that obesity and weight loss can be combat through this diet, and that the “food guide pyramid” is to blame for obesity and diabetes. The diet is not low in fat, and claims that low fat diets are to blame for the obesity and diabetes epidemics. Low fat diets lead to an increased intake of highly processed foods, sugar, and food high in carbohydrate.

This diet claims to increase energy, lose weight, and improve morale and body image. According to Dr. Atkins, the diet menu containing 20g of carbohydrates meets or exceeds recommended allowance of most vitamins and minerals. The diet is a high protein and high fat diet that works by activating lipolysis. This diet mobilizes fat for energy instead of using glucose for energy.

According to the author, the diet works because carbohydrates break down into sugar (the body’s preferred fuel source). Without carbohydrates, the body still needs energy so it responds by mobilizing fat for energy from fat stores. When the body uses fat for energy, the body is in lipolysis and body fat decreases along with appetite.

Overview of Diet:

The diet is broken up into three phases. The first phase, involving the induction diet, is used to jump start lipolysis and only allows 20g of carbohydrates a day. The second phase, for weight management, adds 5g of carbohydrates per week. Throughout the diet, carbohydrates must not exceed 60 grams.

Sample Induction Diet:

Breakfast:

Eggs, scrambled or fried w/ bacon, ham, sausage or Canadian bacon
Decaffeinated coffee or tea

Lunch:

Bacon cheeseburger, no bun
Small toss salad
Seltzer water

Dinner:

Shrimp cocktail w/ mustard & mayo

Clear consommé

Steak, roast, chops, fish or fowl

Tossed salad

Diet Jell-O w/ whipped cream

Sample Management Diet:

Breakfast

Western omelet

3 oz. tomato juice

2 carbo grams of bran crispbread

Decaffeinated coffee or tea

Lunch

Chef's salad w/ ham, cheese, chicken & egg

Zero CHO/ oil & vinegar salad dressing

Iced herbal tea

Dinner

Seafood salad

Poached salmon

2/3 cup vegetables

½ cup strawberry ice cream

Assessing the Atkins diet is difficult, due to the lack of portion sizes offered. The composition of the percent kilocalories from macronutrients appears to be different from normal recommendations. The diet has <10% kilocalories from carbohydrates, and the remaining calories from protein and fat. Due to the high protein amounts, there is a possible toxicity risk with the B vitamins. Possible deficiencies include calcium, biotin, phosphorous, magnesium, zinc, selenium, copper, manganese, and molybdenum. The diets also appear to be low in most nutrients, due to a lack of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and dairy products. Fiber appears to be low in this diet as well, which can cause complications.

Well Rounded and Sustainable:

This diet has phases and uses motivating language that may sound sustainable. Dr. Atkins goes into detail about advancing your diet, re-incorporating carbohydrates over time, different types of diets that may work for different people and ongoing weight loss strategies. Long-term maintenance is addressed with continuous carbohydrate control and introducing foods in moderation. Behavior modification is also addressed with an entire chapter on exercise. The benefits of exercise are emphasized many times throughout the book and how it's important for weight loss and weight maintenance. Bad habits

commonly used by those on the Atkins diet are also addressed, along with possible solutions.

Although the book mentions ways to make this diet sustainable and a means of life long weight maintenance, there are many restrictions that may be hard to stick to long term. The diet itself is restrictive, and may be abused or compromised on by those attempting to follow it.

Critical Comments:

- The induction diet includes only 20 grams of carbohydrate per day. This is done to achieve the induction of ketosis, which can cause further weight loss. Ketosis breaks down the fat that is stored by insulin. Dr. Atkins proposes that when carbohydrate is eliminated, or greatly limited in the diet, natural ketosis occurs, as in hibernating animals, to promote breakdown of fat and utilization for it as fuel in the body.
- The induction diet does not include fruit, and is low in fiber and dairy products, which contain carbohydrates. This could compromise the nutritional status of the participant. It is not a balanced diet, and has uneven calorie distribution.
- The diet overall appears to be appropriate for hunger control, since frequent meals are encouraged. Quality is also stressed over quantity, and participants are instructed to eat as much of the foods allowed until satiety occurs, but not to overeat.
- After two weeks of the induction diet, the diet shifts to the ongoing weight-loss diet. This diet gradually increases carbohydrate intake in 5-gram increments. Depending on the desired amount of weight loss, the rate of increasing carbohydrate will be different for each person. The carbohydrates suggested may not be enough to promote normal body functions, however.
- Nutritional supplements are described in detail, and seem to be a “quick fix” proposed to any deficiencies created through this diet. These supplements are also high in cost, and may not be taken when needed.
- May not be palatable to the dieters, due to its restrictive food choices.

Overall Conclusion

The Atkins diet has positive benefits associated with it, but also negative consequences. It is positive in that it promotes making healthy food choices, monitoring portion sizes, reduce the intake of added sugars and empty carbohydrates, and also promotes lifestyle and long-term changes. The diet does, however, does limit the amount of fruit and whole grain products that can be eaten, provide a strict diet that must be followed, and greatly limit a person’s food choices.

The argument and claims the author makes are, unfortunately, extremely convincing. The author makes readers believe that people were not meant to consume as much carbohydrates as recommended and doing so is what leads to obesity. The diet does put a warning out for people with severe kidney disease and pregnant or lactating women. This diet should not be recommended, however, and is highly restrictive and very difficult to stick to for long periods of time. Initial weight loss may be difficult to

maintain, due to the rigidity of the diet, and its vast change from normal food patterns. Overall, the Atkins diet does not appear to be nutritionally adequate to meet the recommendations of the general population, and should not be advised.