

Go for turkey, not stuffing to keep the weight off

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This Oct. 12, 2010 file photo shows roasted garlic and herb turkey with forest mushroom and salami stuffing. More turkey, less white bread and mashed potatoes. Just in time for holiday feasting, a large study found that diets higher in protein and lower in carbohydrates can help overweight adults who managed to drop some weight keep it off, The Associated Press reports Wednesday, Nov. 24, 2010. (AP Photo/Larry Crowe, File)

(AP) -- More turkey, less white bread and mashed potatoes. Just in time for holiday feasting, a large study found that diets higher in protein and lower in carbohydrates can help overweight adults who managed to drop

some weight keep it off.

As every yo-yo dieter knows, the real struggle isn't so much shedding pounds, but keeping them off. Past research has shown that as long as you burn more calories than you eat, you can slim down in the short term no matter what [diet](#) you try. Fewer studies have looked at ways to avoid packing it back on.

European researchers led by Denmark's University of Copenhagen think they have a solution to break the cycle.

Diets rich in lean meats, poultry and beans, and low in starchy carbs appear "to be the ideal for the prevention of [weight regain](#)," they wrote in a study in Thursday's [New England Journal of Medicine](#).

The study involved 773 overweight and [obese adults](#) with families from eight European countries. The adults had already lost on average 24 pounds after two months on a low-fat diet and the researchers thought getting their family involved would help keep them on track.

They were all put on one of five diets to test which one was best at preventing weight regain. Four were a combination of high or low amounts of proteins and carbs. The fifth was a control diet consisting of moderate protein, but no limit on carbs.

Dieters in each group ate as much as they wanted and whenever they wanted. They received counseling and were given recipes and cooking advice. They also kept food diaries and provided blood and [urine samples](#).

After six months, only the low-protein, high-carb group regained significant weight - nearly 4 pounds. By contrast, there was a trend toward a little more weight loss for those in the high-protein, low-carb

group.

Overall, there was a higher dropout rate than expected, possibly because it was hard keeping the whole family motivated. Fewer adults on the high-protein, low-carb diet dropped out of the study, suggesting that they were able to stick with it.

With a higher protein diet, "you don't need to tell people that they should eat less. They don't need to concentrate on calories or how much they eat. It's a much more attractive way to try to control people's body weight," said one of the researchers, Dr. Arne Astrup, a nutrition professor in Copenhagen.

The study was funded by a European Commission health agency. Various food makers and diet companies donated food and products.

In an editorial, Dr. David Ludwig and Cara Ebbeling of Children's Hospital Boston, wrote that eating protein may trigger metabolic changes that make people feel fuller than if they consumed carbs or fat.

The biggest drawback was that the dieters were followed for a short period, and more study is needed to see if the weight loss is maintained over a longer duration.

"A diet that could effectively prevent weight regain over the long term would have major public health significance," they wrote.

At least for now, the research suggests, if grandma tries to heap another spoonful of stuffing on your plate this Thanksgiving, perhaps reach for the turkey or tofurkey instead.

More information:

Journal: <http://www.nejm.org>

Obesity stats: <http://www.who.int/topics/obesity/en/>

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