

Low-fat diet, low-carb diet—or 'low both'?

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(HealthDay)—Low-carb diets are often thought of as fad diets that might yield a rapid initial weight loss, but aren't sustainable or necessarily healthy. But when there's academic research behind the

approach, it's worth taking a second look.

A study from Tulane University made headlines for showing that a [low-carbohydrate diet](#) (think Atkins and South Beach, to name a few) is more effective at losing weight and lowering [heart disease risk](#) than a low-fat diet.

Here are the details.

Study participants were divided into two groups. One group followed a diet with less than 40 grams of carbohydrates a day while the other went on a [diet](#) with less than 30 percent of daily calories coming from fat. After one year, the low-carb group had lost an average of nearly 8 pounds more than the low-fat group and saw a boost in their good cholesterol levels.

If you want to try this approach, a carb counter will help you make appropriate choices. In general, your allowable carbs will come from non-starchy vegetables that have very few digestible or "net carbs." That's the number of carbs once the fiber is backed out.

When it comes to fruit, berries are among those with the highest nutrients among low-carb choices.

Grains are almost all carbohydrate, even the better-for-you whole grains. These are still the best choices in the category, however. White flour- and sugar-based foods not only have the most carbs, but also the least nutritious ones. (Cutting out those foods alone could result in some [weight loss](#).)

Fat sources count, too. While the low-carb dieters got 41 percent of their calories from fat, these were most healthy fats from plants like olive or canola oil, rather than butter or other saturated fats.

Just remember that you'll still need to count all your calories to stay within guidelines for [weight](#) loss.

More information: The Harvard School of Public Health has more on results of studies on [low-carb diets](#) and how they could affect health.

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