

# Carb cycling: An exercise in weight loss

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(HealthDay)—Trying to choose between a high-carb and a low-carb diet? There's a third option that might suit you even better.

The concept is called carb cycling, shorthand for alternating between high- and low-carbohydrate days. There's even a variation that lets you make every seventh day a cheat day.

The idea is to mesh two theories about carbohydrates—that low-carb diets lead to more effective [weight](#) loss but that carbs are needed to maximize the effects of high-intensity exercise days. Adding in high-carb days could also be better for your metabolism than a constant low-carbohydrate diet.

Carb [cycling](#) lets you tailor carbohydrate intake to your needs. For instance, the American Council on Exercise points out that to lose weight, you might try a plan of five low-carb days and two high-carb days each week. If improving [muscle mass](#) is your goal, reverse that ratio—five high-carb days interspersed with two low-carb days, matching the high-carb days to your most intense workout days.

### **Carb Cycling to Lose Weight:**

- Make your low-carb days Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays.
- Make your high-carb days Wednesdays and Saturdays.

### **Carb Cycling to Boost Muscle:**

- Make your low-carb days Wednesdays and Saturdays.
- Make your high-carb days Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays.

Science is just beginning to look at the value of a high-carb/low-protein diet. One 8-week study on mice found it may have the same longevity

benefits as calorie restriction. While it's too soon to make projections for people, the researchers point out that however many carbs you eat, they should be high-quality whole grains and vegetables, with moderate fruit intake to limit fructose.

Processed, packaged high-carb foods with added sugars don't deliver [good nutrition](#) and can trigger [hormonal changes](#) that can make losing weight harder. Whenever you're putting carbs on the menu, choose fresh or minimally processed foods that are high in fiber and have only naturally occurring sugars.

**More information:** The American Council on Exercise has detailed information on [carb cycling](#) to help you try this eating plan.

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