

Pastor's Corner – 8-3-2019 – Something I have some business commenting on: What to expect on low carb

Let's suppose you've talked to your trained medical professional about going low carb, he/she has given you two thumbs up, and you're ready ditch your sugar, potatoes, and bread: What should you expect? A related question might be: What should you eat? I'll start with the second question.

In general, if you are cutting back on carbohydrates you will need to replace those lost calories with dietary fat. I know what you're thinking, "if I eat more fat, won't that make me, you know...fat?"

No, actually, it won't. You see, dietary fat has kind of a bad rap, to be honest. It is more calorie dense than carbohydrates or protein. It weighs in at about 9 calories per gram while carbs and protein are less than half that at 4 calories per gram. Simple logic would seem to imply that eating fat (since it is more calorie dense) will result in greater weight gain. But this simple logic doesn't take into account the greater satiety of fat nor the fact that fat doesn't trigger an insulin response. Remember, insulin is a key hormone driving fat storage, it is also tied in with hunger. In general, it's much easier to overeat carbs even though they are less energy dense. Of course, the worst combo is fat and carbs together, like in say, an extra value meal from McDonalds. But if you cut way back on the carbs and replace them with fat, it's actually not that difficult to cut back on total calories as well.

So, what do you eat if you decide to go low carb? I'll go ahead and assume you're a vegetarian for this pastor's corner. If you aren't, well, then eat those things that aren't vegetarian. Animal products are all zero carb, so there's that. But before you decide to go all meataholic on us, check with your ~~denominational prophet~~ medical doctor, first.

Right, so vegetarian options. Let's start with the non-plant sources. Eggs (with the yolk), cheese, cream*, butter. I know, I know, those are supposed to kill you, but the evidence behind the dangers of these things is not as solid as you might think. But if you're worried, ask your doc. So those are some non-meat but vegetarian options.

In the plant world you will need to become friends with avocados and nuts. Those guys are packed with fat and are relatively low carb. Careful about some nuts (like cashews which aren't actually nuts) because they do have carbs that can add up quickly. I've also found that it's easy to overeat on nuts (especially smokehouse almonds or those tasty wasabi ones!). You'll also want to make liberal use of olive oil (or coconut oil if it suits your fancy). Oils, of course, are 100% fat with nothing else. They also are very calorie dense so keep an eye on how much you use. I would personally recommend you ditch the soybean oil, canola, and other seed-based oils (deceptively marketed as "vegetable oils"). There's some good reasons why that I can't dive into, but if you're curious google "how it's made: canola oil". Those things just ain't natural.

As a supplement to the fat, feel free to eat as many fibrous veggies as your little vegetarian heart can handle. It's zucchini season, so go crazy with those bad boys. Dice 'em up, sautee them in butter, drizzle on some olive oil. Good stuff.

Now, depending on how low you want to go with carbs you will need to cut out certain things. The first to go should immediately be anything with added sugar and highly processed grains. Sorry, bread and pasta, ya gots ta go. Even whole grains are very high in carbs (though they trigger a lower insulin response) and if you're going truly low carb you'll have to cut out grains and starches as well. Fruit, depending on which kind, might be ok. I personally eat a fair amount of berries which seems to work for me. I'd also advise against the fake meat products. They are usually loaded with all kinds of weird stuff. To sum it up, eat whole foods, minimally processed, as close to their natural state as possible. Cut back on foods that are carb heavy (how far to cut back is up to you) and replace them with foods that contain more fat.

Ok, now what should you expect from a very low carb diet? When I say very low I'm talking about a diet that is low enough in carbs that you enter into dietary ketosis – that magical state where

you are relying on fat for energy instead of glucose. In order to get into dietary ketosis your total daily carb intake needs to be below about 30g per day. That's not much. A standard slice of white bread has about 11g of carbs. So, 2 slices of toast in the morning with a bit of jam will take you over your daily limit.

If you're able to limit the carbs to the ketosis range then after a few days you'll start to feel really awful. Yeah, it's true, eating low carb makes you feel bad. Some people call it the keto flu. It's not because of some nonsense like "detoxing" but rather that your body is accustomed to running off glucose and it takes a while for it to learn how to switch over to fat. There are enzymes your body produces that help the process but it takes time for you to begin producing them in high quantities. Until that happens, your body kind of thinks you may be starving. But don't worry, our bodies are really really smart, they'll get with the program eventually. You just need to push past the headaches, lethargy, and weakness if you want to experience the benefits of low carb eating. It can take a couple weeks to a month (or more) to become fat adapted and you can mitigate some of the yucky feelings by drinking lots of water and eating lots of salt.

The next thing you'll experience is rapid weight loss in the first couple of weeks. You'll get really excited, believe the diet is magical, and then get sad when the process slows down over the following weeks. What's happening initially is that you are losing a lot of water weight. When your cells are stuffed full of glucose they tend to hold onto water. Once you deplete those glucose stores the cells release the water. So, sorry, but the initial weight loss on a ketogenic diet is mostly water (minerals get flushed with it which is why you need more salt when you go low carb). You also lose a little bit of weight because you're not carrying around as much waste material in your intestines. Since you're eating more calorie dense foods you don't eat as high volume so your belly tubes are filled with less...stuff. Right.

Another thing you can expect are carb cravings. As you become more fat adapted those will get better. Except at potluck. It's impossible to stay low carb at potluck. I've tried and failed, many, many times. So now I call Sabbath my "cheat day", eat the butterscotch whip cream dessert, and then reboot on Sunday.

You should also expect plenty of judgment from people who don't understand why you are doing what you are doing. They will think it's some kind of stupid fad diet, or a dangerous diet, or even (true story) Satan's counterfeit diet designed to weaken the remnant and kill off God's people. So, get ready to become a pariah. I'm exaggerating just a little here (unless you go really meat heavy and then you can feel the judgment from across the room) but you will definitely be counter cultural if you go low carb. But you know what else is counter cultural? Being trim and not having metabolic syndrome, so, there is that.

If you stick with the low carb diet you will eventually fat adapt and start ramping up ketone production. Your strength and energy will come back as will your mental clarity. I've personally been able to run marathons while in ketosis, needing very little fuel and zero carbs to finish the training runs. If you begin to cut calories while eating low carb (fairly easy to do) you will start to see actual weight loss (not just water). Your insulin levels will drop way down along with your lower blood sugar. People will still judge you until you drop a bunch of weight and get better lab results from your doc (who you are definitely in contact with, right?). Then it doesn't matter what they say.

Well, I'm out of space. Good luck and remember – whole foods as grown, not too much. Fats over carbs.

Happy Sabbath
Pastor Tyler

*You have to be a little bit careful with dairy because it contains carbs in the form of a milk sugar called lactose. If you're being really strict about it, then try not to do too much dairy. And if you're lactose intolerant or sensitive, avoid it altogether.