



Why I Low-Carb

by David Mendosa

While I have known for years that I could control my blood glucose and weight on a very-low-carbohydrate diet, two concerns previously stopped me from going low-carb. I imagined that this way of eating might not be safe or sustainable.

For most people, these concerns are a deal breaker. For more than a dozen years after learning that I had diabetes, they were for me, too.

Instead, I followed and wrote about a diet that I considered more moderate. That low-glycemic-index diet restricts only fast-acting carbohydrates, which are mainly starchy foods.

Then, for a couple of years I succeeded at controlling my blood glucose and weight with a new diabetes medication called Byetta. During that time I gradually began to eat fewer carbs.

I've specialized in writing about diabetes for a dozen years. So, of course, I made it a point to become familiar with the work of the leading advocate of a very-low-carb diet for people with diabetes, Dr. Richard K. Bernstein. I know and greatly respect this maverick diabetologist.

All three editions of his key book, *Dr. Bernstein's Diabetes Solution*, are in my bookcase, and I've studied them carefully. A big part of his solution is for those of us who have diabetes to consume no more than 6 grams of carbs for breakfast and 12 grams each for lunch and dinner.

But since such a very-low-carb diet essentially implies a diet high in fat, my safety concern was that going low-carb would make my already unsatisfactory lipid levels even worse. For half a century, the American medical establishment has preached that a high-fat diet raises LDL ("bad") cholesterol and triglycerides, leading to heart attacks and strokes.

Thousands of Dr. Bernstein's patients do seem to do well on the very-low-carb diet that he advocates. But it wasn't until science writer Gary Taubes debunked the myth that a high-fat diet leads to heart problems that I was able to put to rest my safety concerns with this way of eating. His book, *Good Calories, Bad Calories*, exposed the flimsy evidence behind our national concern about eating fat. That book changed my life.

But even if a very-low-carb, high-fat diet was safe, was it one that I could follow for the rest of my life? The answer to that question was to take it one day at a time. That's what I did beginning last year.

I imagined that a very-low-carb diet would feel limiting and boring. I used to lust after bread and potatoes and rice. But that “carb lust” passed away as I broke my addiction to it.

I never used to eat many vegetables other than the starchy ones. Now, I have discovered dozens of tasty, low-carb vegetables as well as many other foods new to me. I’m eating less but enjoying it more.

And for the first time in my life, all my lipid levels are within the normal range. My most recent LDL cholesterol result was down to 99; my HDL (“good”) cholesterol was up to 59, and my triglyceride level was way down to 75.

My HbA1c level is down to 5.3% or 5.4% (I took six separate tests on the same day at the American Diabetes Association’s Scientific Sessions in San Francisco in June). My weight is down to 153 pounds, which on my 6’3” frame is a body mass index (BMI) of less than 20.

Diet alone isn’t everything. Exercise has become a big part of my life. With my new lifestyle I feel younger and have more energy than I have had in years.

Best of all is what I don’t have to do. By controlling my diabetes with diet and exercise alone, I have been able to stop taking all diabetes and cholesterol medications.

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