

# Truth Behind the Claims

**Claim:** *Dr. Robert Atkins stated, "his diet makes 'bad' cholesterol fall and 'good' cholesterol rise" (Associated Press, 10/25/99). He also claimed that "there is no scientific evidence whatever that the diet has harmful effects" (NBC's Dateline, 9/27/99).*

**False:** A study published in the Journal of the *American Dietetic Association* (1980) looked at the consequences of a high-protein, low-carbohydrate diet. The research subjects followed *Dr. Atkins' Diet Revolution*. Subjects' total cholesterol and "bad" cholesterol (LDL-C) levels increased, while "good" cholesterol (HDL-C) levels decreased. These changes were particularly alarming in the women subjects, whose LDL shot up nearly 33 percent.

The authors concluded that "diets, such as this [*Dr. Atkins' Diet Revolution*], may increase the long-term risk of atherosclerosis" - a disease characterized by sudden spurts in the growth of fat and cholesterol-loaded deposits that clog arteries, which may lead to heart disease. Research conducted in the past 25 years supports this outcome- low carbohydrate high protein diets drive cholesterol levels up.

**Claim:** *Atkins states that there is no scientific evidence that a person's kidneys can be made worse by high-protein intake. (CNN, 10/21/99).*

**False:** The Center for Disease Control & Prevention states "A diet high in proteins can cause more damage to your kidneys over time." The National Kidney Foundation recommends reducing dietary protein intake to slow down the progression of kidney disease.

**Claim:** *Atkins' stated that "ketones" are better brain food than glucose, citing Dr. George Cahill (CNN, 10/21/99).*

**False:** Cahill discusses ketones in terms of starvation. "Ketoacid levels in blood become elevated over the first week, and the brain preferentially uses these instead of glucose." (Clin. Endocrinol. Metab. 1976.) Only when a person is starving to death, does the body resort to ketones. Very low-carbohydrate intake induces ketosis, which is most commonly seen in starvation, alcoholics or untreated insulin-dependent diabetics. Normally, glucose (which only comes from carbohydrates) is the body's preferred food/fuel for the brain.

**Claim:** *In his book, Atkins stated that while the percent of calorie intake from fat has decreased, the percentage of Americans who are overweight has increased - suggesting that the rise in obesity is due to carbohydrate intake.*

**False:** While percentage of fat from calories has dropped, total fat and caloric intake has not dropped. Americans are eating more calories and more fat now than in the 1950s. The average daily consumption between 1976 and the early 1990s is about 300 more calories per day. The USDA Healthy Eating Index shows Americans already eat plenty of protein and fat, but fall short of meeting dietary goals for grains, fruits and vegetables (so how could they account for the weight gain). (Source: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.)

**Claim:** *Eating more protein and fewer carbohydrates is the best way to lose weight.*

**Fact:** The only way to shed pounds is by decreasing the calories you take in and increasing the calories you burn off. Nutrition experts agree that the healthiest way to cut calories is to increase physical activity and consume a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet rich in grains, fruits and vegetables. You can reduce fat and calorie intake without reducing food intake by shifting to high-carbohydrate, low-fat foods such as pasta, bread, tortillas, bagels and other grain-based foods.

**Claim:** *A high-carbohydrate eating plan increases muscle fatigue and decreases mental alertness.*

**Fact:** Carbohydrates are the body's primary fuel for activity and the only form of energy used by the brain. To keep energized and beat brain drain on the job, don't leave home without breakfast, and do not go longer than four to five hours between meals and snacks.

**Claim:** *Carbohydrates stimulate the appetite and are addictive.*

**Fact:** Complex carbohydrates provide long-term energy and they help jump-start your metabolism. As your metabolism speeds up, your body burns calories more efficiently and you may get hungry between meals. This sometimes is mistakenly associated with carbohydrate cravings. Studies show that for some people, fueling up with several small meals throughout the day is better than three big meals.

**Claim:** *A high-carbohydrate eating plan enhances insulin resistance, which causes the body to store excess carbohydrate as fat.*

**Fact:** Carbohydrate consumption does not promote insulin resistance. According to the American College of Sports Medicine and the ADA, "Symptoms of insulin resistance occur most often among people who are overweight and sedentary and can usually be reversed or diminished by adopting moderate exercise and healthy eating."