

four steps to a healthy new lifestyle

The Atkins program is very often confused with its initial phase, called Induction, when carbohydrate intake is most strictly curtailed. In reality, four increasingly liberal dietary plans follow each other in a series of seamless stages that eventually become a new way of eating you can adopt permanently.

1 induction

This two-week maximum fat-burning program jump-starts your body into the metabolic state known as ketosis (see page 26), making it consume its own excess body fat faster than you ever thought possible. This phase is very strict in its limitation of carbohydrates. (Because of its rigor, the Induction phase is not suitable for children under the age of 12, pregnant women or people with severe kidney disease.) You eat no more than 20 grams of carbs a day. Most people lose at least 5 to 10 pounds in the first two weeks during Induction. If you have a significant amount of weight to lose, you may safely stay on the Induction phase longer.

the rules of induction

- You may eat pure protein (meat, fish and shellfish, poultry, eggs) and pure fats (butter, olive oil, mayonnaise).
- Eat no more than 20 grams of carbohydrates per day in the form of salad and other vegetables, such as asparagus, broccoli and kale.
- Eat absolutely no fruit, bread, grains, starchy vegetables or dairy products other than cheese, cream or butter.
- Eat out as often as you wish. Just be alert to hidden carbs in gravies, sauces and dressings.
- Eat no food not specifically allowed.
- Aspartame may stimulate insulin production; avoid it and foods containing it.
- Check the carb content of all foods you are unsure about with a carbohydrate gram counter.
- Caffeine stimulates the production of insulin, so avoid regular coffee, tea and cola drinks.
- Eat the amount of food that makes you feel satisfied, but not stuffed. If you're not hungry, eat nothing or have a small protein snack to accompany your supplements.

2 ongoing weight loss

You can liberalize your carbohydrate consumption slightly on Ongoing Weight Loss (OWL), which you will follow for as many weeks or months as it takes you to get close to your goal weight. It's important to understand that this liberalization on the carb front is not a license to return to your old eating habits. Instead, increase your daily intake of carbohydrates by 5 grams each week, i.e., 25 grams daily the first week, 30 grams daily the next week. By doing this very gradually you won't fall out of ketosis. This is how you find your Critical Carbohydrate Level for Losing (CCLL). Typical 5-gram increments include 10 Brazil nuts, half an avocado, ¼ cup of blueberries or ½ cup of green beans. You can even add carbs in the form of 4 ounces of dry wine, 6 ounces of light beer or 1 ounce of gin or whiskey daily. Naturally, you will see a gradual decrease in the pace of your weight loss as you add carbohydrates back into your diet. And that's fine. The purpose of the whole program is not to lose weight fast, but to get it off and keep it off—forever.

3 pre-maintenance

When you get close to your ultimate weight goal, understandably you will want to take off those last five or six pounds in a hurry. But it's important to carve them off over the course of two or three months. That's because the biggest problem with weight control is not losing but maintaining. You may have gone on a crash diet in the past, only to gain it all back faster than you lost it. What you should do is just the opposite. By losing those final pounds with excruciating slowness, you'll actually be easing yourself into a permanently changed way of eating.

For the Pre-maintenance phase, each week simply add another 10 grams of carbs to what you have been eating each day on OWL. Or give yourself a 20-gram carbohydrate treat two or three times a week. You can now even touch some of those formerly forbidden starches such as a baked potato or a slice of pizza. Or add some favorite fruits: apples, bananas, peaches, grapefruit. As long as you don't start gaining weight and continue to lose at an almost imperceptible rate, you're doing fine. However, if eating any foods creates food cravings or provokes symptoms that disappeared while you've been on the program, stop them immediately.

4 lifetime maintenance

Once you arrive at your goal weight, offer yourself some well-deserved congratulations and prepare for a lifetime of slimness. When you have totally stopped your weight loss, your appetite will increase toward its normal level. For this reason, your Lifetime Maintenance program will still be fairly restrictive of carbohydrate foods. You'll need to find your own Critical Carbohydrate Level for Maintenance (CCLM), meaning the level at which you neither gain nor lose weight. At this level, you will still restrict carbohydrates enough to curb some of your appetite. For most people, this ranges between 40 and 100 grams of carbs a day—still considerably less than the 300 grams the typical American consumes in a single day!