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Your diet of choice may determine your mood.

Diet Dilemmas

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Faster may not be better.

There are so many diets on the market today. New ones keep appearing. The diets come and go. Since one in three Americans is on some sort of a diet, we see why the diet industry is a multibillion dollar business. There is the “Master Cleanse Diet,” “Fat Smash Diet,” “Flat Belly Diet,” “Cabbage Soup Diet,” “Hallelujah Diet,” “Personality Type Diet,” “Master Your Metabolism Diet,” “Martha’s Vineyard Diet,” “Detox” and many others. People are getting tired of fad diets that don’t work in the long-term, and leave them feeling and looking no better than they were before the diet.

There is an ongoing discussion as to whether a low-carb diet (such as an “Atkins Diet”) is the most effective for losing weight, or if a low-fat, low-calorie diet is the best and safest. So where should we focus—cutting carbs or reducing fats and calories?

Human experiments have demonstrated that persons following low-carb diets experience a greater weight loss over a six-month period than do those following a low-fat diet. After 12 months, there is no significant difference. Why does a low-carb diet work more effectively in the short term?

Low-carb diets are high in protein, which induces a stronger satiating effect than fat and carbohydrates. Since fat delays the emptying of the stomach, a meal that is higher in fat will satisfy hunger longer than low-fat foods. All but eliminating most carbs (rice, bread, cereals, pasta, potatoes) means a simple, monotonous diet. Restricting food choices limits the intake of calories considerably. Carbohydrate restriction also leads to depletion of glycogen. Hence, the early weight losses may be due to loss of water rather than fat.

Typically, traditional low-carb diets provide favorable changes in blood triglyceride and HDL levels, while LDL



levels unfortunately increase substantially. Low-carb diets tend to be low in fiber, potassium, magnesium, folic acid and other B vitamins, so a multivitamin supplement is necessary. Those who consume low-carb diets often complain of bad breath, constipation, headache, muscle cramps, lack of concentration and physical weakness. Long-term risks of using a low-carb diet are unknown at this time.

An Australia study reported that both their low-carb and low-fat diets produced an average 30-pound weight loss over 12 months, with both groups experiencing mood improvement after eight weeks. However, after eight weeks those on a low-carb diet reverted to a negative mood, while those on a low-fat diet maintained their improved mood throughout the year.

People in the National Weight Loss Registry (a database of people who have lost weight and successfully kept it off for more than a year) typically eat a diet rich in fiber and complex carbohydrates, and eat less fat than the average American. Bulky, fiber-rich meals increase feelings of fullness, and delay hunger. More fruit and vegetables in the diet will help one to manage their weight more effectively.

Winston Craig, Ph.D., RD, is a professor of nutrition at Andrews University.