

Low carbohydrate diet (less than 130g/day)



What is a low carbohydrate diet?

A low carbohydrate diet (commonly called low carb) is designed to limit the amount of sugary and starchy carbs that you eat. This diet aims to restrict carbohydrate to about 100g/day.

What is carbohydrate?

Carbohydrate is the name for the nutrients in the diet that provide energy, and they are usually broken down to a sugar called glucose. They are found in all foods with sugar added to them (cakes, biscuits, jam, sweets, chocolate) and in starchy foods (bread, potatoes, rice, pasta).

Other foods such as fruit and milk contain carbohydrate in the form of natural sugars.

How does it work?

Reducing the amount of carbs you eat can help you lose weight, and if you have diabetes it can help reduce blood glucose levels.

Is it safe?

Studies show that low carb diets are safe and effective over the short-term (up to a year) but there is no information about any long-term effects. As you get used to the diet, you may find that you get some side-effects and these include:

- Feeling light-headed
- Palpitations
- Change in bowel habits – either constipation or looser stools
- Headaches

Most people find that these symptoms get better if they drink plenty of water and that they pass after the first two or three weeks. If they continue or you are worried about them, you should see your doctor.

How much weight will I lose?

On average, people lose about 5kg, but there is great individual variation and you may find that you lose more or less than this.

What can I eat?

There are three main principles:



Principle 1. Avoiding sugary and refined starchy carbohydrates

Try to avoid these foods as far as possible:

- Sugar, sweets, chocolate, jam, marmalade, honey, syrup
- Puddings, desserts, ice-cream, biscuits, cakes, pastries
- Breakfast cereals, porridge
- Bread, potatoes, pasta, noodles, rice (both white and wholegrain types)
- Savoury snacks – crisps, twiglets, corn snacks, Bombay mix
- Anything made with flour – pastry, batter, sauces
- Most take-away and convenience foods

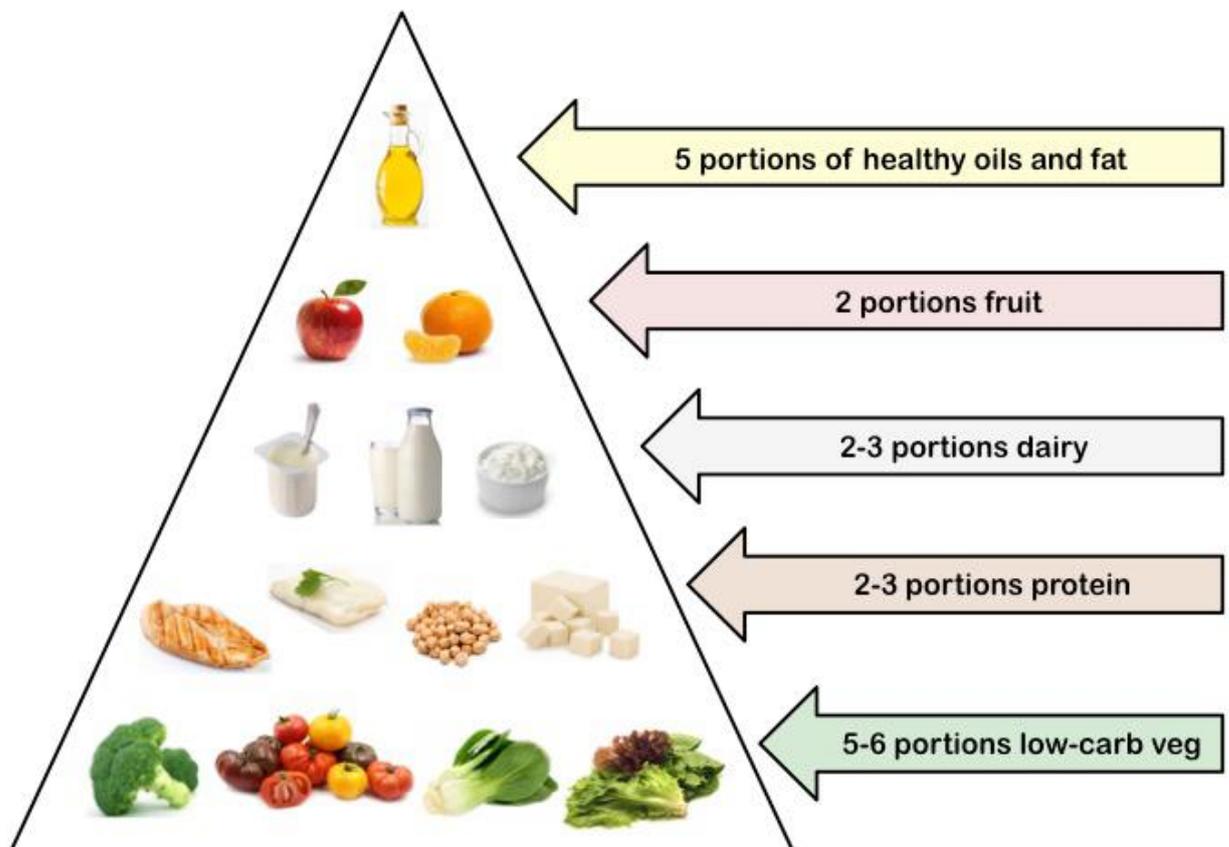
There are other foods that contain natural carbohydrate that you can eat and they include:

- Milk and natural yogurt
- Whole fruit
- Most vegetables excluding potatoes
- Pulses and legumes (dried peas and beans)



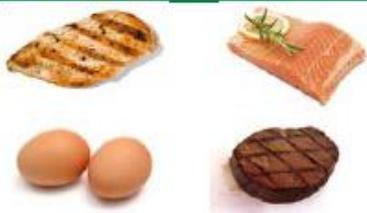
Principle 2. Eating a healthy, fresh, Mediterranean style diet

Including plenty of fresh, unprocessed food in your diet means that you will be getting good quality nutrition and you will know exactly what is in the meals that you are eating. Try to substitute fish, poultry and legumes and pulses for red meat, include healthy fats such as olive or rapeseed oil and base your diet on low carb vegetables. Base your diet on the pyramid below.



Principle 3. Watch your portion size

There are many useful ways to judge your portion size, including weighing your food, using the size of your hand or comparing your portion to a tennis ball or pack of cards.

Vegetables		1 portion = 125g (4oz)			
Meat and fish		1 portion = 125g (4oz)			
Vegetarian		1 portion = 125g (4oz) cooked weight			
Dairy		1 portion =			
			½ pt (284ml)	125g pot	125g (4oz)
Fruit		1 portion = 4oz (125g)			
Healthy oils		1 portion = 1 teaspoon			

Low carb vegetables

One portion is the amount filling one of your cupped hands. Eat 5-6 portions a day. Almost all vegetables are low in carbs so fill your plate up with all types of green leafy veg, mushrooms, onions, courgettes, squash, marrow, aubergines, beansprouts, carrots, peas, parsnip, turnip and swede.

Some vegetables are high in carbs, including potatoes, sweet potato, yam, plantain and sweetcorn and should be avoided as far as possible.

Fruit

One portion is about size of your fist. You can choose 2 portions of fruit daily. Choose lower carb fruits such as berries, apples, pears, stone fruit such as plums and peaches and citrus fruits.

Limit higher carb tropical fruit such as bananas, mangoes, papayas and pineapples.

Lean protein

One portion is the size of the palm of your hand and the thickness of your little finger, or the size of a pack of cards. Eat 2-3 portions daily. Choose fish, both oily and white fish, shellfish and poultry rather than red meat. Vegetarian choices such as eggs, lentils and dried beans and peas can be included and you are encouraged to choose one portion of lentils or beans daily. Two eggs count as one portion.

Low fat dairy

Each day you can include ½ pint skimmed or semi-skimmed milk and a small pot of natural, unsweetened yogurt. Low carb, low fat cheese can also be included.

Meal suggestions

Breakfast:

Boiled, poached or scrambled eggs served with grilled tomatoes and mushrooms.

Omelette stuffed with spinach or mushrooms.

Paneer or egg bhurji (Indian dish, scrambled egg with spices) with tomatoes, spinach or mushrooms.

Smoothie made with berries, natural yogurt and milk.

Mixed berries or stewed fruit with natural yogurt.

Poached smoked haddock with spinach and grilled tomatoes.

Grilled turkey bacon with tomatoes and mushrooms.

Main meals:

Grilled, steamed or oven-baked fish with at least 2 portions of vegetables.

Curried meat, chicken, fish or paneer served with raita or vegetable curries.

Piri piri meat, chicken or fish served with vegetable stews.

Chicken, tuna, cottage cheese or eggs with a large salad.

Roast or grilled lean meat, or vegetarian option with at least 2 portions of vegetables.

Casserole of lean meat, poultry or fish made with at least 2 portions of low carb vegetables.

If you enjoy cooking and would like to experiment, there are plenty of low carb recipe books to choose from.

Commonly asked questions

Can I have snacks between meals?

As this diet is designed for weight loss, you are advised to avoid snacking as far as possible. However, you may take two or three weeks to get used to this diet and if you feel hungry between meals during this time then try to save your portions of fruit and use them as between-meal snacks. You can always nibble on low carb vegetables if you need a snack.

What about alcohol?

You do not need to avoid alcohol entirely, but it is worth remembering that all alcoholic drinks contain calories and may slow down your weight loss. It is recommended that you avoid all alcohol containing carbohydrate and that you drink within healthy limits. Alcohol can be measured in units (1 unit = a small glass of dry wine or a pub measure of spirits), and you should have no more than 14 units each week. You should also try to have at least 2 days each week without alcohol.

The following drinks contain carbohydrate and should be avoided:

beer, lager, cider, sweet/medium wines, port, sherry, liqueurs and all types of alcopops.

You may include all types of spirits (gin, vodka, whisky, rum, brandy) with or without sugar-free mixers and dry red or white wines.

Can I exercise?

Most people find that they are able to maintain their usual levels of physical activity on this diet.

For general health, it is recommended that you try to take 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity (you should be slightly sweaty, feel your heart beating more strongly than usual or feel slightly breathless) each week.

What about my medication?

You should discuss your medication with your doctor before starting this diet. If you have diabetes and you take insulin, sulfonylureas or glinides then you will need to reduce or stop your medication to avoid low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia). If you are taking treatment for high blood pressure, then you may need to reduce some of your medication. Contact your healthcare team for advice before starting the diet.