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Low-carbers lack fibre, health council says

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With all the focus on carbohydrate control, have healthy eaters forgotten about fibre?

The dieting buzzword from the 70s and 80s may soon be back on everyone's lips with the recent formation of the US National Fiber Council. The organisation has blamed low-carb dieting for aggravating an already serious fibre deficit in the American diet.

The council estimates that while the average American gets just half their daily fibre needs, low-carb dieters get 25 percent of this amount, due, they say, to an increase in meat and reduction in whole grains, fruit and vegetables.

In supporting her case, dietician Pat Baird, a member of the council, recently referred to research indicating 70 percent of people on the Atkins diet suffered constipation as a side-effect.

Aussie Bodies nutritionist Leigh Blashki said people could still obtain the benefits of carbohydrate-reduced eating without having to sacrifice fibre.

"People reducing their carbs need to keep close watch on their fibre intake. Apart from the cardiovascular health benefits, fibre helps steady the release of sugars into the blood which is important for controlling insulin and weight gain," Blashki said.

"Many organised forms of low-carb diet have an induction phase which recommends the avoidance of fruit, starchy vegetables and grains. However there is no restriction on leafy green and other non-starchy, low-carb vegetables, which provide valuable fibre as well as improving satiety. Some people have misinterpreted or misused induction phases, by avoiding all vegetables and remaining on the phase for more than the recommended 4-6 weeks. This will lower fibre intake which may result in constipation.

"But you can maintain a longer-term carbohydrate-controlled lifestyle by simply cutting down on the refined sugars and processed grains, not the whole grains, fruits and vegetables which contribute fibre and other valuable nutrients.

"In addition, many low-carb drinks and snacks are significantly low in fibre. Watch for the fibre content in the nutritional information panel. Products like Aussie Bodies **Lo-Carb Protein Revival** contain optimum fibre levels at 15 grams per serve."

Blashki said it was unfair to condemn all low carb diets for worsening the fibre issue.

"Most low-carb diets actually encourage the eating of adequate amounts of non-starchy vegetables.

"Health organisations should put greater emphasis on the need to include fibre-rich foods in all diet plans, while communicating to dieters the need to cap the induction phase at 4-6 weeks."

Australian, New Zealand and US dietary guidelines recommend consuming 30 to 35 grams of

fibre per day. The National Health and Medical Research Council estimates the current average daily Australian fibre intake at 20 grams.

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