

Dean Ornish, M.D.

The Atkins Ornish South Beach Zone Diet



One of the most encouraging developments to come out of the TIME/ABC News Summit on Obesity earlier this month was an emerging consensus among nutrition experts about what constitutes a healthy diet. Here, one of America's most prominent diet gurus summarizes key points of agreement.

AS A VETERAN OF THE DIET WARS, I THINK IT'S TIME TO CALL A truce. Rather than hear experts argue, most people want practical information they can use. Significant points of difference persist, but there is a real convergence of ideas happening and more consensus than many realize.

For example, I have become more mindful of the importance of limiting the intake of simple or refined carbohydrates ("bad carbs") such as sugar and white flour than I was when I began doing cardiac research 27 years ago. Likewise, the Atkins acolytes have started to highlight the importance of eating more fruits and vegetables ("good carbs") rather than emphasize bacon and Brie. Meanwhile, the American Heart Association recently revised its guidelines to include the considerable benefits of omega-3 fatty acids.

So, where do most of us agree?

- 1. AVOID TRANS-FATTY ACIDS AND PARTLY HYDROGENATED FATS ("BAD FATS").** They increase the shelf life of food products but decrease the shelf life of people who eat them.
- 2. CONSUME SOME OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS EVERY DAY ("GOOD FATS").** Only three grams a day may reduce your risk of sudden cardiac death as much as 50% to 80%, lower your triglycerides, reduce inflammation (e.g., arthritis) and may help prevent cancer. You can eat fish—including salmon, mackerel and halibut—or take fish- or flaxseed-oil capsules from which contaminants have been removed.
- 3. EAT FEWER "BAD CARBS" LIKE SUGAR AND WHITE FLOUR.** They are low in fiber, so you get a double whammy: a lot of calories that don't fill you up and, because such carbs are absorbed quickly, a blood-sugar spike and an insulin surge, causing you to gain weight.
- 4. EAT MORE "GOOD CARBS" LIKE FRUITS, VEGETABLES, LEGUMES AND UNREFINED GRAINS SUCH AS WHOLE-WHEAT FLOUR AND BROWN RICE.** They are rich in fiber, which slows

Dr. Ornish, director of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute, is the author of Eat More, Weigh Less and other best sellers

absorption and fills you up before you take in too many calories.

5. CALORIES COUNT. It's not low fat vs. low carb. You can eat fewer calories by eating less food—which is why you can lose weight on any diet that restricts entire categories of foods or limits portion sizes—but you may get hungry and gain it back. Fat has 9 calories per gram, but protein and carbohydrates have only 4 calories per gram, so when you eat less fat, you consume fewer calories without having to eat less food. So eat less fat and fewer simple carbs.

6. WHAT YOU INCLUDE IN YOUR DIET IS AS IMPORTANT AS WHAT YOU EXCLUDE. There are at least a thousand substances that help protect against chronic diseases like

heart disease and cancer. With few exceptions, those protective substances are found in good carbs such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes.

7. LOSE WEIGHT IN A WAY THAT ENHANCES HEALTH RATHER THAN HARMS IT. You can lose weight by smoking cigarettes or taking such stimulants as amphetamines, fen phen and ephedra, but they are not healthful ways of doing so.

8. ENERGY BALANCE IS IMPORTANT. You lose weight when you burn more calories (exercise) than you consume.

9. EXERCISE MORE. Simple changes like taking the stairs, parking a little farther away and walking 30 min. a day can make a difference. Small increases can lead to big improvements over time.

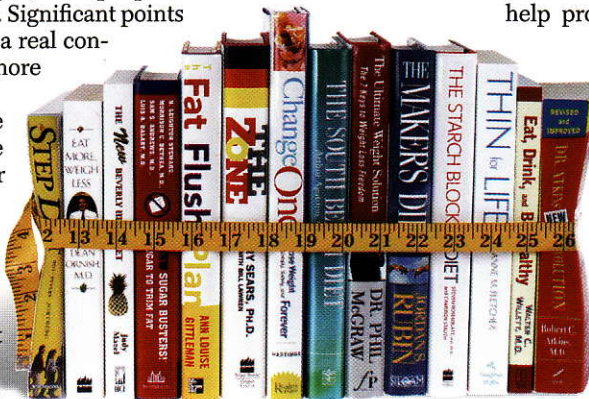
10. EAT LESS RED MEAT. Dr. Atkins may have disagreed, but it's loaded with artery-clogging saturated fat and has been linked to an increased risk of cancer.

11. BEGIN BY MAKING MODERATE CHANGES IN YOUR DIET. If you want to lower your cholesterol level or weight even more or if you have heart disease and want to reverse it, you may need to make bigger changes.

12. TALK TO SUPPLIERS. Encourage foodmakers and restaurants to make it convenient and pleasurable to eat more healthfully.

13. CHOOSE QUALITY OVER QUANTITY. Smaller portions of good foods are more satisfying than larger portions of junk foods, especially if you pay attention to what you're eating.

You have a wide range of dietary choices; it's not all or nothing. If you go on a diet and feel constrained, you are more likely to drop it. But if you see your food choices each day as part of a spectrum, then you are more likely to feel free and empowered. If you indulge yourself one day, you can eat more healthfully the next. To the degree you move in a healthful direction on the food spectrum, you're likely to feel better, lose weight and gain health. ■



TOWER OF BABEL The gimmicks that diet books use to break out of the pack tend to sow confusion