High Protein / Low Carbohydrate Diets

High Protein / Low Carb (Carbohydrate) Diets

- Long term, these fad diets can be harmful. Many of the health claims about these diets are not based on scientific proof.
- Low carb diets are still just that – a diet. Most people find maintaining a low carb diet difficult if not impossible long term.
- Even if weight is lost, 90% of fad dieters gain all or most of the weight back in five years.

Current High Protein / Low Carb Diets

- Currently there are many of these diets out there. Some popular ones include:
  - Dr. Atkins New Diet Revolution
  - South Beach (Phase I)
  - The Zone
  - Protein Power
  - Sugar Busters
- Suggested carbohydrate amounts vary from diet to diet, but all are suggesting amounts that are below the recommended 45 - 65 % of total calories. Some suggest amounts as low as 15 grams. That is equal to one slice of bread or one small piece of fruit.
- We all need variety in our lives, including in our food choices. These diets are very limited in the choices available. That makes it very hard to stick to a diet like this long-term.
What are the risks?

- **Nutrient Deficiencies**
  It is impossible to get a balanced diet because carbohydrates are so low. These diets do not allow enough sources of fruits, grains or milk which can lead to deficiencies in fiber, potassium, calcium, Vitamin D and folate.

- **Loss of Lean Body Mass**
  Our bodies, especially our brains, prefer carbohydrates as an energy source. When carbohydrate is not eaten, the body is forced to use protein for energy. This can lead to decreased muscle mass. This accounts for the weight that is lost and can lead to weakness.

- **Kidney Damage**
  The kidneys have the potential to become overworked with these diets. One reason is because the kidneys are forced to excrete extra amounts of minerals such as sodium, calcium and potassium. Also, the kidneys must deal with increased amounts of protein by-products.

- **Ketosis**
  Ketone bodies are acid in nature and are by-products of fat metabolism. Starvation or eating a diet that is too low in carbohydrate can lead to the build up of ketone bodies (ketosis). This is a potentially fatal condition when the blood becomes too acidic. These changes cause more work for the kidneys. Ketosis can also lead to fatigue, weakness, nausea, headache, irritability, bad breath and dehydration.

**Smart Weight Loss**

- There is no magic diet, pill or combination of foods that help to reduce weight. Decreasing total calories and exercising remain the keys to losing weight. Carbohydrates are an important part of your diet.

- For more information on smart weight loss, see the handout, *Ten Tips for Sensible Weight Control and Healthy Living*.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.