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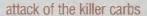
## iust at it

Do you avoid carbs at all costs? Shun sugar and dairy at every turn? Could be you're suffering from a food phobia or two, reports **Bronwen Gora**.

arn Wright thinks she's found the perfect solution to her weight problem. She's cut out all bread, pasta, potatnes and rice, and cats only steak, thicken and vegetables.

The only carbohydrates she allows to pass ber lips, Sam says, is a slice of toast for breakfast. But Sam doesn't realise she's replacing all that lost energy from good carbohydrates with the eight teaspoons of sugar – pure carbohydrate – she puts in the four cups of coffee she's now drinking to get through the day.

"I can't exercise every day like I used to," she says. "I'm only running two or three times a week now because I just don't have the energy. But I've lost so much weight people are commenting."



Like many women and men, Sam suffers from a carbohydrate phobia. She's scared of eating bread and has placed pasta up there with King Island cream in the fattening department.

According to Helen O'Connor, eleutian with the Sydney Sports Medicine Centre at Olympic Park and a lecturer at Sydney University's Department of Exercise and Sports Science, many food phobias can be traced back to body-

image problems

The most common food phobia O'Connor sees is the anti-carbohydrate fad, spurred by the Atkins Diet. It's reportedly responsible for the stick-thin figures of stars such as Jecnifer Aniston and Courteney Cox. The diet works in stages Fitst, you cut out carbohydrates to ger your body into a state of ketosis, in which it rapidly burns fat. Then you increase your carbohydrate intake to just 20 per cent of your food intake. Nutritional guidelines set by the Australian Government recommend we eat 50 to 55 per cent carbohydrates.

"People I see on low-carb, high-protein diets range in how strict they are," O'Connor says. "Some may out bread out but eat fruit, others cut pasta and eat rice."

But the reality is, most food phobias are impossible to maintain. Starve your body of certain nutrients and it will crave them. "People can lose a lot of weight on the Atkins Diet, but it's nor a diet you can maintain," O'Comor says.

Just ask carb-conscious Sam Wright "I only last a few months at a time

then I'm eating bread and pasta again," she says.

pasta again, sne says What you may not realise is that highprotein diets can be downright dangerous Eating an above-average amount of protein



can damage your kidneys if they're already weak, and can lead to consupation through a lack of fibre.

Clinical studies of the Atkins Diet show that long-term use cause heart disease, high blood pressure and liver problems.

## allergic or just intolerant?

Of course, some people cut out bread and pasta because they claim they're intolerant to wheat. It's true that eating too much wheat can make you feel sluggish and bloated, especially if you're in a sedentary desk job. But cut out wholegrain wheat products and you risk missing out on B vitamins and folate.

Sydney-based nutritionist Suc Radd says it's possible to live without wheat — people with cocliac disease, sparked by gluten intolerance, are forced to do so. "But you mustn't cut out other wholegrains like brown rice, corn, linseed or barley," Radd says.

The fibre from wholegrains has important health benefits: bowel cancer is one of the top four leading causes of death in Australia and is forecast to become the leading cause in the Western world, Radd says.

While carbohydrate has become a dirty word, the trust fear-inducing foodstuff is still fat. But cutting good fats from your diet can have serious repercussions, including dry skin and, ironically, weight

gain, as your body doesn't function properly when it's deprived

of essential nutrients.
Omega 3 oils are helpful in
preventing diseases,
especially cancer. The
best sources are fish,
soybeans, canola oils,
walnuts and linseeds.
Don't make the
mistake of thinking

that if something is low-fat, it must be healthy. Many low-fat and "light" foods are high in sugar. Nutritionists say that many people overindulge in low-fat foods because they're not as satisfying as full-fat versions. So, they end up eating too many sugars and don't lose weight.

Sugar is over represented in many of our diets, especially as it's not something we need to eat. But nutritionist and author Cyndi O'Meara, an advocate of organic and whole foods, says a little bit of sugar is not a problem – and that goes for fat and salt, too.

"If a food doesn't reach the bliss point

– and fat, salt and sugar are the three
things that make food taste beautiful

– then you'll feel deprived," O'Meara says.

- then wor'll feel deprived, O'Mears says.
 When O'Meara cirinks chai tea, she sweetens it using organic milk and muscavada, a sugar that is juiced and crystallised, rather than heavily-processed white sugar.

## milking it

Dairy is another food group that's often avoided, particularly by women who are worried about putting on weight. They claim they're lactose intolerant, when in fact they're ust trying to avoid the fat in milk cheese and voobutt.

in milk, cheese and yoghurt.

Milk is a good source of riboflavin,
a B vitamin. As with wheat products, if
you're going to cut out dairy, you need to
know how to get autrients from other
sources. Green leafy vegetables are a great
choice: "Your absorption of calcium
from milk is far less than that of the
calcium in an organic vegetable,"
O'Meara says.

One of the most dangerous food phobias is the fear of eating fruit and vegetables. Some people ditch fruit because of its high sugar content, while others spurn vegetables, especially starchy pumpkin and potatoes, because of their high carbohydrate content. But eating fruit and vegetables is vital to long-term health, says Radd.

"There are now 200 studies saying vegetables and fruit are strongly protective against a range of cancers," Radd says. Her book, Ear To Live, explains how phytochemicals found in plant foods work to prevent cancerous cells from taking hold, and fight cancer cells that do take hold.

"In time, it's likely that a deficiency of the phytoestrogens could be linked to many more diseases than just cancer, including osteoporosis and degenerative conditions as Parkinson's disease," Radd says. "The wide range of phytochemicals in fruit and vegetables will never be found in just one pill. People put themselves at tisk if they only rely on taking vitamin supplements. They've got to get back to nature and cat more plant food."