

Health & Science

High Protein Diet Good For Fitness Buffs

Tom Griesel, a 40-year-old office manager for the Long Island Lighting Co. in Roslyn, N.Y., used to place his faith in linguine, fettucine and capellini.

But now there's a different holy trinity as far as he's concerned, and it's known, somewhat cryptically, as 40-30-30.

In June, Griesel decided he did not feel very healthy. So he switched his diet from one heavy on carbohydrates, like pasta, to one that emphasized protein. Forty percent of his diet these days consists of protein, like grilled salmon; the other 60 percent is evenly divided between carbohydrates and fat.

"After eight weeks, I've lowered my body fat by about 5 percent," he said. "I've been weight training at the same time, so I've put on some lean body mass at the same time." He weighs 175 pounds, about the same as when he switched, but in terms of the way he feels, the new diet "has made a tremendous difference in a short period of time."

Griesel is one of an untold number of fitness buffs who are turning away from the high-carbohydrate eating patterns so popular over the last 10 years.

The debate continues over the best combination of protein, carbohydrates and fats a person should consume to feel healthy. And while fitness experts and trainers have no exact numbers, many say they definitely see more people realigning that balance.

Among the small army of people striding in formation atop machinery at gyms like Crunch in Greenwich Village or the United States Athletic Training Center on Madison Avenue are many recent converts to high-protein diets, who have made the change after trying other approaches, and sometimes simply on the advice of friends or trainers.

"There are these trends every few years," said Sarah Dent, Crunch's publicity director. Behind her was Brian Beck, a 23-year-old sweat-soaked actor who switched six months ago, "because I had to get in shape," he said. Protein is workout-friendly because "you need protein to build body mass," said Telf Murray, a trainer at Crunch.

"I have one client, a screenwriter, who three or four months ago cut the bread and added more protein. You can already see better muscle definition."

Athletes have focused on a protein-heavy diet for years, but now, "the general public is becoming more aware of it," said Gary Guerriero, the owner of the United States Athletic Training Center, a year-old gym on Madison Avenue.

"People are seeing some real nice changes, and that's why it's started to come down into the general public in the last year or two. It's the nutritional phase for the 90s," Guerriero said.

One impetus for turning to a high-protein diet is outlined in a recently published book, "The Zone" (Regan Books), which evolved on the training table for high-performance athletes. But in health clubs and homes around the country, people who have never heard of the book are adopting its principles and saying they feel quicker, trimmer, and generally better with fewer carbohydrates.

The jury is still out on the precise formula put forth in "The Zone," which was written by Barry Sears, a medical researcher formerly on the staff at MIT. Sears writes that food is a drug, capable of producing physical responses far more complex than any pharmaceutical element could. "The zone" is a reference to what Sears calls "that mysterious but

and body type are also factors in determining a balance of nutritional needs. But the overarching theory, the one that affects people's behavior in the supermarket, is that too many carbohydrates prevent the body from burning fat.

Hence a diet that stresses large

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very real state in which your body and mind work together at their ultimate best." Baseball players, gymnasts and other athletes know about this, he adds, but so can the person trying to get in shape after a day at the office.

"You must eat food in a controlled fashion and in the proper proportions - as if it were an intravenous drip," Sears writes.

"The dietary technology required to reach the Zone is as precise as any computer technology." It's not only what you eat, but what you eat with it. He writes it's OK to eat the occasional fat-laden ice cream, for example, as long as you also eat some sliced turkey at the same time, combining protein with fat and carbohydrates. Exercise, metabolism

proportions of pasta, bread and other starchy foods will mean a weight gain, or at least no weight loss, among people whose lives do not include hours of physical activity every day.

Nancy Picker, a magazine advertising sales manager in Manhattan, was one of those people. "I couldn't understand it," she said. "I was working out three times a week and eating lots of pasta, and I was gaining weight. I was actually on the sluggish side."

In March, without having read "The Zone," Ms. Picker switched to a new trainer who encouraged her to increase the protein in her diet and reduce the carbohydrates. Now she has about 70 percent of her calories from protein, works out for 90 minutes four times a week, and has lost

14 pounds.

"I can count on one hand the number of times I've had bread, and I've cut out pasta," said Ms. Picker, who is 33. "People say, 'how can you not have pasta?' But I don't miss it."

Tina de Lempis, Ms. Picker's trainer, said she began to notice the down side of the high-carbohydrate diet two years ago.

"Particularly for women, all the stuff about low fat, eat all the carbohydrates you want, has proven not to work," she said.

"I started fooling around with practically zero carbohydrates a couple of years ago and it worked very well from a weight-loss perspective. There's much better results with weight training, because you need protein to build muscle."

Barbara Cohen, an aerobics instructor who works at various sites around the city, said she has noticed the shift as well. "In the last year, people are leaning toward a little more protein and less carbs, because it's real easy to go overboard on the carbs," she said.

Of course, not everyone is a convert. "There is an awful lot of witchcraft out there that might at one time have had a kernel of scientific truth behind it," said Dr. James Rippe, a cardiologist and director of the Center for Clinical and Lifestyle Research in Shrewsbury, Mass.

Rippe, who is also the medical advisor for the International Health, Racquet and Sportsclub Association, a trade organization for many health clubs, added: "The principles of nutrition for recreational athletes are very similar to the principles of nutrition for regular people. Less than 30 percent of your calories should come

from fat, and most calories would be eaten early in the day."

And high protein isn't in vogue everywhere. At Casa, a gym in a brownstone on the Upper East Side, the owner, Chris Imbo, said protein should constitute 15 percent of a person's daily intake, with 60 to 75 percent of calories coming from carbohydrates and just a smattering of fat.

The 40-30-30 system was developed in the late 80s for varsity swimmers at Stanford University. Sears worked with the men's and women's teams to develop his diet, and in his book, takes much of the credit for the eight gold medals team members brought home from the Barcelona Olympics in 1992.

Dennis Saul, a 51-year-old trader on the New York Stock Exchange, has spent the last 25 years figuring out what combination of nutrients and exercise works best for him, reading everything from Adele Davis to running magazines. What he has concluded is that the proportions advocated by Sears and others "is right on the money."

Maria Adams, an equities trader in Manhattan, is also following a high-protein diet, but in proportions she worked out herself. Most days, she consumes about 1,600 calories, 60 percent of which are protein. Then there's another 30 percent in carbohydrates, and 10 percent in fat. She works out three times a week, but is not above taking a slide now and then.

"If you treat your body like a temple five days a week, and two days like an amusement park, you can pretty much keep things level," Ms. Adams said. "So I have that cannoli once in a while."

Power Lineman Directs Award To Burn Center

The Oregon Burn Center at Legacy Emanuel Hospital and Medical Center in north Portland is the beneficiary of a \$1,000 donation from the PacificCorp Foundation, thanks to a Pendleton Pacific Power employee.

Butch Sams, a PacificCorp crew foreman, was among five honored by the company for administration of first aid to two victims of a pickup and freight train accident in May 1994. The crew was working near an unmarked railroad crossing when the accident occurred.

While one worker used the company radio to call an ambulance, Sams and other crew members administered first aid until

help arrived. The utility's Spirit of Excellence award winners select a charity to receive a \$1,000 donation from the PacificCorp Foundation.

Asked why he selected the Oregon Burn Center to receive the donation, Sams noted that, as a lineman, he wanted to help people who have sustained severe electrical burns, because "it could be me."

The Oregon Burn Center provides up-to-date and advanced burn care for residents of Oregon and southwest Washington.

The donation will be used to purchase new equipment and patient education materials.

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