

With the New Year fast approaching, many folks choose to make healthier lifestyle choices. Here's a first-person account of one man's experience:

10 Tips from a Recovering Carb-oholic by Thomas Blake

When I went in for my annual physical exam two years ago, my cholesterol, blood pressure and BMI were high, and I was a long-time sufferer of heartburn. The doctor was not too concerned, but he suggested a follow-up visit in three months. Both of my parents suffered from high blood pressure and diabetes for many years and took medications for these conditions.

I never had any health issues before, and I didn't want to end up on medication for the rest of my life. I had to face facts: I was turning into a couch potato and eating everything and anything that wasn't nailed down.

I searched the Internet for diets and exercise programs and found information suggesting that switching to a low-carb diet could help with heartburn, cholesterol and blood pressure and improve energy and strength.

After my physical, I consulted with a nutritionist, and she gave me a metabolic fitness test. We discussed the results of my physical, and I told her about my activity level. She put me on a low-carb, high-protein diet combined with a fitness program. I also started training with a personal trainer.

After about two or three weeks, my cravings began decreasing, and my weight dropped. I had more energy and strength. I couldn't wait to get back into the gym to work out.

I thought I was on the right track, until I went in for my next physical three months later. My blood pressure and BMI were the same as they were before I started this routine, and my HDL (good cholesterol) improved a little. Even though I felt stronger and more energized, my numbers did not show the improvement I expected.

Even so, I wasn't discouraged. I continued to keep up the exercises and diet throughout the year. I met with the nutritionist once a month and worked out with a personal trainer twice a week for about eight weeks.

About a year later, my cravings diminished, and my energy levels continued to increase. My blood pressure and my cholesterol now are in a healthy range.

I still have my sweet indulgences, but I am not scarfing down a dozen doughnuts or eating a whole coffee cake and a bag of chips every night. I exercise regularly, and I plan to run my first marathon next summer.

If you're considering a lifestyle change like mine, here are some tips I can share based on my experiences:

1. **Don't be hard on yourself.** In the beginning of your low-carb journey, be patient. Don't expect to see results right away.
2. **Be prepared.** It's going to be hard to resist the lure of sweets and snacks. Expect that, and don't let it deter you.
3. **Look for recipes.** There are lots of low-carb cookbooks with tasty recipes that can help make the transition from high carb to low carb easier. I recommend starting off with low-carb treats and snacks. Might as well tackle the indulgences first, then slowly switch to the main meals. Keep the treats on hand so when the cravings hit (and believe me, they will), you're ready.

4. **Find restaurants.** Check out popular restaurants for their low-carb options. Look at their menus online before you go so you're not tempted by other items when you get there.
5. **Seek out experts.** A qualified personal trainer and nutritionist can help devise a fitness and diet program suited to your needs and goals. A good nutritionist can help you adjust your carb intake based on your metabolism and fitness level.
6. **Don't kid yourself.** Be honest and open about your fitness goals, and don't be embarrassed if you resort back to your old high-carb way. Setbacks are common. Nutritionists are there to help you get back on track.
7. **Track it.** I recommend keeping a food journal and note the time, the snack/treat consumed and what you were feeling. Were you bored, stressed, just plain hungry when you wandered off the diet? Keeping track of your emotions can help.
8. **Stay upbeat.** Positive reinforcement is essential. Human beings are not perfect, and maintaining any kind of regimen requires hard work and discipline. With the proper encouragement, a low-carb diet will become second nature.
9. **Spread the word.** Let friends, family members, co-workers and neighbors know that you are on a fitness journey and are following a low-carb diet. Be sure those close to you understand you may want to keep your low-carb food separate from their high-carb food.
10. **Reach out.** There are plenty of motivational tips and recipes on Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter and various social media food forums. People from all over the world are sharing their stories and dieting tips. Set up accountability groups and find a fitness buddy. If there are low-carb meet up groups in your area, join one. If there aren't any groups, consider starting one. As an added bonus, being a leader can be motivating. When others are counting on you, you won't want to let them down.

Wishing you joy and good health,
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