

Chapter 8: How Do You Know If Low Carb Is Working?

Physical Changes

Body weight: One of the simplest ways to track the progress of your new low carb lifestyle is your weight. Initially most experience weight loss within the first week or two. Most of this initial weight loss is due to the loss of water. This is because 'water follows carbs'. When one eliminates carbs, one eliminates the water that hangs around with it. This is one of the reasons why those eating a low carb diet are encouraged to drink plenty of water. Replacing electrolytes by getting plenty of sodium and potassium is important as well. Ways to replace salt include adding extra table salt to your food. Or, even better, adding Lite-Salt to your food. Lite-salt can be found in the grocery store in a light blue container. Lite-Salt contains both sodium and potassium.

Use of a scale is recommended. The frequency is left up to the individual but it should be at least monthly. Daily weight checks can be a bit confusing due to the ebb and flow of the normal variation caused by such things as sodium intake and water retention.

Body mass index (BMI): BMI, or body mass index, is another measure that can be tracked. It is a measure of weight divided by height squared. By using an online calculator or a smart phone app, you can input your height and weight into the BMI calculator. A normal BMI is between 18.5 and 25. If you are starting with a BMI greater than 30, a normal BMI is not the best goal to shoot for initially. Rather, shoot for a more modest goal, say a 5% loss of body weight. For example, if you weigh 300 pounds, 10% of that weight is 30 pounds and 5%, half of 10%, is 15 pounds. This

is a more realistic goal. A loss of 5% may not seem like much to you, but it is likely that most of the metabolic markers we follow (fasting glucose, fasting insulin, triglycerides, lipid ratios, simple measure of progress. Measure your waist at the level of the belly button with a tape measure. Recording one's waist circumference on a monthly basis is often enough. If you're losing weight, you're also likely noticing the loosening of your old clothes.

Biometric Changes

Blood pressure: If you have a history of high blood pressure or hypertension, you should have a blood pressure monitor. Taking your blood pressure every other day is a good idea. It's expected that your blood pressure will decrease as you experience weight loss. One of the most satisfying feelings is having your medication reduced or even discontinued. When the medication is discontinued it is called deprescribing. It is one of the most satisfying things this doctor can do.

Laboratory Changes

Blood sugars: If you have prediabetes or diabetes, you should have a blood glucose monitor. If you're decreasing your carbs significantly, you should see significant improvement in your blood glucose measurements. For those individuals who are on insulin, they may be instructed to cut their dose. Check with your doctor first regarding reducing or eliminating some of your medications. It is essential that those on insulin and certain oral diabetic medications follow their

blood sugars carefully. This is to prevent hypoglycemia, or low blood sugar, which can be very dangerous.

You are encouraged to check your blood sugars every day. For those not on insulin, it is still important to monitor your blood sugars frequently at the beginning of your low-carb adventure until you're comfortable of where your blood sugar values are. A continuous glucose monitor is ideal.

After you have a sense of how your blood sugars are behaving, it is preferable that you obtain glucose measurements at different times of the day. For example, on day 1 measure your blood sugar before breakfast, on day 2 before lunch, on day 3 before your evening meal and on day 4 before bed. Then begin the process all over again (see Table 1). Over time you should be able to see a trend. The average blood sugar at each time should be decreasing.

Table 1. Form to Record Blood Sugar Measurements

Date	Before Breakfast	Before Lunch	Before Dinner	Before Bed

Table 1. Form to record blood sugar measurements

With decreasing weight and increasing physical activity, you're likely to be in a healthier condition. One would expect the heart rate, or pulse at rest, to decrease. You can also expect your maximal heart rate with exercise also likely to decrease a bit. These are both measures that are signaling you're headed in the right direction.

Chapter Summary

- Individuals who begin a low carb lifestyle will notice a number of physical changes.
- There will be improvement in weight, body mass index, waist circumference, blood pressure and blood sugar levels.

- To prevent hypoglycemia, an abnormally low blood sugar that can be quite dangerous, it is crucial that individuals using insulin have their dose adjusted according to their healthcare provider's instructions.
- It is crucial to monitor their blood sugars very carefully with the initiation of a low carb diet. After stabilizing, blood sugars may be obtained less frequently. For example, blood sugars may be obtained once a day. Rotating the time daily blood sugars are obtained such as before breakfast, before lunch, before dinner and at bedtime is a good idea.
- Blood sugar measurements should be recorded and brought to their healthcare provider's appointments to be evaluated.

Resources