

Is This Cheating?

I've often seen a question that goes something like this: *"Is it cheating if I just eat one corn chip?"*

Well, that partly depends on which lowcarb plan you're following. And which plan you're following can't always be determined by what you would like to be on, but by what plan (or more likely, what combination of plans) ultimately works best for your body.

For instance, if you're on Protein Power, then according to that plan, assuming you include the carbs in your count and your count is still okay for that day, then no it is not cheating. If you're on Atkins induction it IS cheating (no grains—corn is a grain). If you're on Atkins OWL and still losing regularly and steadily and it fits within your CCL, then no, it is not cheating. If you're on a anti-yeast Atkins, KISS, or paleo-style lowcarb, then it is cheating.

The bottom line: if you're struggling to lose on any lowcarb plan then it might be cheating for you, or at least more counterproductive to your progress than you might realize.

It also can depend somewhat or a lot on where you are in your journey. If you're extremely overweight and in the early part of your journey sometimes, for some people, eating one corn chip (assuming you can stop there and not eat another bite off plan for, say, at least a week), might not be considered cheating, in that it will not seem to have any appreciable impact on your ongoing weight loss. But if you're closing in on goal, say 40 pounds or less from there, then for some folks, eating just one corn chip could halt weight loss progress for 2-4 weeks. And you've got to think long and hard about whether one corn chip is really worth THAT.

You might recall that Atkins mentions that for many folks, one of the reasons lowcarb works so well is because it essentially removes the sources of unrecognized food intolerances...and grains (which corn and wheat are) are a prime example of foods to which many folks are unknowingly hypersensitive. So if your body is this category, the ramifications of eating one corn chip might be a lot more severe than for someone who's body is less or non-sensitive.

To my mind, body, and observations of other lowcarbers on lowcarb lists for many years now, along with the intolerance issue comes the addiction issue. For some of us some foods, especially certain foods (most often grains, nuts, legumes, dairy foods and alcohol—including sugar alcohols) are trigger foods. Much like an alcoholic must totally abstain from even a drop of alcohol in order to succeed long term with a life of sobriety, those of us with food addictions seem to do better with a similar mindset and eating behavior choices.

For those of us more seriously entangled emotionally with food, the question to ask is not "Is this cheating?" The real question becomes "is this bargaining?" Because addicts over and over again try to bargain with the truths we do not want to face.

Obviously we cannot stop eating, but we can stop eating trigger foods. And if corn, or any other food, is a trigger food for you, then eating one corn chip can be akin to an alcoholic trying slip in a tablespoon of vodka a day—it can subtly make you progressively more miserable on lowcarb, sometimes just miserable enough to have a little more corn in a day or so....then slowly (or overnight for some folks) more and more and MORE, until we're hiding, collapsed in a heap under the kitchen table with a gallon of ice cream and a spoon.

As someone who had to eliminate and stay free of my own trigger foods in order to lose all the way to goal and thrive and even enjoy maintenance, to find it almost effortless, I had to achieve this kind of food purity and sobriety. I had to stop bargaining.

Cheating is a funny word—it's a feelings-charged, pejorative word. Counterproductive is a more descriptive, neutral way to state this. Is eating one tortilla chip counterproductive to weight loss in some lowcarbers? Yes, absolutely. For a lot of us it's like playing with matches and gasoline.

Here's my bottom line...you'll always do better without it. It's a subtle form of self-sabotage that can, in some of us, eventually lead to self-destruction. If you are willing to regularly risk that, well then go for it—if one corn chip *really* makes you happy. But I'd suggest taking a hard look at why eating one corn chip, risking so much of what you think you want for such a tiny little payoff, seems so important to you.

Trust me, there is life—a wonderful life—after corn chips or any other self-medication food. There is a simple, not easy, but profoundly peaceful way if you will only stop trying to find a way, a bargain, around that.

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