

Maintenance—Let the Testing Begin

A newly at-goal lowcarber wrote:

I don't want this whole WOE to backfire a few months or years down the road. I am not in the regular habit of "cheating" but I was under the impression that you could have an occasional higher carb item once you were in the later phases. I do not intend to go around eating cake and desserts all the time but will I be able to have the very occasional dessert without causing my body a lot of grief???

I guess my question really is where do I need to draw the line and how do I know where the line is?

Nobody can answer those questions except for you and your body and its reactions, over time, to the **tests** you decide to give it. That's why, in my opinion, the place where you now are in this journey is critical and where the very few people who are lucky enough to get to this wonderful place more often than not end up letting it all slip through their fingers, go down the tubes—overnight, or over several years. (I see now that I let that happen BOTH ways, once each.)

I think one thing that is important to do, probably over and over, is to read Atkins' chapters on lifelong maintenance. Maybe as often as once a week for a while. I also think the first caveat of this is to go SLOWLY *like a snail!* There is no need to hurry through this. You likely will not have all your own personal answers even within a year or even two. I'd say my own set of answers took me around 5 years of maintenance....and a few of my eating parameters have changed, ever so slightly, since that time.

In that sense, the gentle testing never ends.

Knowing what is generally safer to play with, HOW and how OFTEN to test your limits, I think, are all important to the learning. It will take some trial and error, executed within a fairly careful framework if you want to avoid the biggest pitfalls, especially until you're **sure** you can climb out of the pits if you find you ever have to.

For instance, I think it's VERY safe to experiment with eating almost any vegetable (save white potatoes and corn, which is not a vegetable, it is a grain) in slowly increasing amounts. It is also somewhat safe to experiment with fruits, especially the lower glycemic ones, especially if you were able to incorporate them into the weight loss part of your journey; *if you deal or dealt with yeast/candida or if Gold Standard eating was necessary to your weight loss success, fruit **may be** more problematic.* The same is true of nuts. Whole grains would be next, assuming you avoided them during the weight loss phase. Just remember that MANY find that completely avoiding grains, especially wheat and corn, altogether in any form turns out to be an important part of why lowcarb worked so well, and it's not uncommon for people to not be able to successfully include them in maintenance.

I believe you also have to watch not only for weight gain, but for some subtle emotional/attitude changes after you've eaten certain foods a few times over the course of a month or longer.

For instance, I was one who eventually learned, more than a year into maintenance, that I simply do better without any fruit (probably due to yeast issues). I never had drastic weight gain from eating a small piece of fruit every day or so, but over time I noticed that when I was experimenting with eating fruit, there was a slow creep. But what was more disturbing was that I slowly started thinking....which moved to obsessing....about that fruit in my day, and I was disproportionately UNhappy about not having fruit in a day; I had fairly strong difficulty executing the decision to skip it for a while. After being free of food obsessions for 4-5 years of lowcarb, it eventually dawned on me that I hated just having that yearning, *that food-fight*, back in my life, and ultimately made the decision for myself that my life is better, much more peaceful, with no fruit.

On the minefield/pitfall end of the spectrum, playing with "regular" foods (those that contain refined sugars and white flour) is for more than a few of us like playing with dynamite; like an alcoholic playing around with cough syrup. SOME of this depends on whether and how seriously your body was physically addicted to these kinds of foods, and a lot of us simply can't come to see or understand quite HOW insidious those addictions actually were—and what those foods do to both our physical and emotional selves—until we try to eat "just a little" of those kinds of things on a special occasions or two.

Yes absolutely, some *can* do that; it is one maintenance "style". But I would say many more cannot than can. And until you cautiously find out which kind your body is, *tread gently* with this. Lead with a PLAN, and *always* have a simple, basic lowcarb plan (and the food to fulfill it) ready to go for several weeks or longer whenever you take a venture like this, in case you find yourself back in the gutter, hiding under the kitchen table with a gallon of ice cream and a spoon. That just might be your first clue that you have more than physiological issues with foods, or that certain kinds of foods have stronger impacts on you and your behavior decisions than you ever understood before embarking down this path to change.

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