

What's This I Hear About Tweaking?

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"What is this I hear about tweaking?" you ask. Well, at some point during your low carb journey, you'll begin to notice that certain foods work better *for you* than others and some low carb foods that don't cause problems for other lowcarbers cause problems *for you*.

The term "tweaking" refers to the fine-tuning we do to find what specific foods our own bodies operate best on. It is not unlike the little "tweaks" that a mechanic does to your car's engine to get the best possible performance from it. Tweaking isn't something that can be done in one week or even in one month. However, the time invested in these little discoveries will be well worth the effort invested.

This is where your *personal* journey really begins. This is the direction in which the fun and experimentation in our low carbohydrate way of life lies. I'm not talking about going off plan by any means, just diverting a bit off the course you've followed to this point and refining your plan to suit your body's unique needs.

I do suggest that any new lowcarber follow their chosen plan to the letter for several months before beginning any refinements, though. Many people will follow their chosen plan as it was designed for even longer if that basic plan continues to work for them. Following the plan *as written* allows you to learn and understand the low carbohydrate plan thoroughly, and to get used to everything that goes with it. It will also get you used to counting carbs, reading labels, and watching how your body reacts to the plan itself. I firmly believe that each of us has a set of foods that our bodies run most efficiently on. Finding those foods is all part of the process of getting yourself to your ultimate goal - be it better health, a new low weight, or a certain size of clothing.

Why would a person start tweaking?

There are several reasons. The biggest is when you hit a prolonged stall or plateau and stop losing weight. I want to caution you, however, that weight loss is not linear and there will be times when you stop losing for periods of time. This is normal. On the other hand, if you've been stalled for 6 weeks or more then maybe it's time to start figuring out why. Other reasons include water retention or outward signs of food intolerances such as skin problems, acid reflux, or other allergy-like symptoms.

So, how does one go about tweaking?

It usually starts with small changes. For example, you notice that you consistently react poorly to processed meats by retaining water. The first step is cut out the processed meats and see if the water retention subsides after a few days. Then try the food again. If you get the same reaction (assuming all other factors have been similar), then you can probably say that your body doesn't like nitrates or some of the other chemicals or food additives used in the curing/smoking processes. Other obvious things to cut out are diet sodas, lowcarb treats, caffeine, artificial sweeteners, dairy products, soy

products, or other otherwise low carbohydrate foods that you think you *may* be sensitive to.

Some things take longer to get out of your system. When I gave up dairy I did so for at least a month before trying it again. When I reintroduced it, the negative reactions were instantaneous! I immediately experienced stomach bloat, the return of sinus problems, skin problems, etc. I decided that *for me* it wasn't worth putting up with the symptoms eating dairy products caused for me to continue eating dairy.

A good rule of thumb when experimenting with cutting things out of your daily diet of foods is to do so for at least 2 to 4 weeks. This gives you enough time to get your body clear of the food itself *and* to get you used to what it feels like without eating it. This way, any side effects that do show up upon reintroduction will be very obvious.

What if you take something out of your daily diet and it doesn't help? Well, look for another culprit and get rid of that, too. Then reintroduce them one at a time at two week intervals. Many times there is more than one thing that you are sensitive to, or you may even be sensitive to things *in combination*.

In my personal case, taking the plunge into anti-yeast lowcarbing was an eye-opening experience. I was already dairy free, but there were still things I needed to eradicate from my daily food choices. In the case of such drastic changes, it's best to go back to the basics foods of lowcarbing first: processed meats, fresh vegetables, eggs, good oils, and plus water. Once you've eaten this way for several months, then start reintroducing foods one at a time, building upon them until you find the one that has caused the problem.

All of this may sound complicated and impossible to tackle, but keep in mind that you may not need to go through every step, since not everyone has a whole list of intolerance foods. Sometimes the small tweaks done in the beginning solve the problem, and sometimes further experimentation needs to be done down the road. All the tweaks I've done have happened over the course of several years and with each one I learned quite a bit.

My journey isn't over - I doubt it ever will be. I continue to this day to experiment with things and fine tune my internal engine for optimum performance. May you enjoy your journey as much as I've enjoyed mine along the way!

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Still at goal in 2010