

Carnivore diet challenges norms, reveals health transformations

Though not everyone is sold on it, [Philip Ovadia, MD](#), isn't shy about the carnivore diet. And the cardiothoracic surgeon at OSF HealthCare has studies and a remarkable personal experience to back it up.

"I've been on a carnivore diet for five years. For another two to three years prior, I was on low carbohydrate diets in general," Dr. Ovadia recalls.

"I have lost over 100 pounds and maintained the weight loss. I reversed my prediabetes. And today as I'm approaching 50 years old, I really feel better every day than I did in my 20s and 30s."

Dr. Ovadia says anyone can try the carnivore diet, but you should do so with guidance from a health care provider.

The carnivore diet: what (and what not) to eat

Dr. Ovadia calls the carnivore diet "our ancestral diet." He says as long as humans have been around, meat has been a fundamental part of their diet. Ancestral humans would add plants, like fruits and vegetables, "seasonally and sporadically," he says.

Today, the carnivore diet looks about the same. A person consumes animal products like meat, dairy and eggs but abstains from plant products and processed food. Some people are stricter than others about what they choose depending on their needs. For example, some people cut out spices and seasonings on their meat, while others use them.

Yes, Dr. Ovadia admits this diet flies in the face of advice we've heard since we were kids.

One, we've been told to incorporate fruits and vegetables into your diet.

"There are no essential nutrients that are not available in animal products," Dr. Ovadia retorts. "The animal has eaten the fruits and vegetables. In many cases, ruminant animals like cows have multiple stomachs that are better able to digest the plant products and better able to extract the nutrients. Those nutrients end up in the animal meat.

"When you really dig into the scientific literature around fruits and vegetables, their benefit is in substituting for processed food," which is prevalent today, Dr. Ovadia adds. "In the context of someone eating a lot of processed food, when you start eating fruits and vegetables, you see improvements in health."

Two, we've heard red meat increases the risk of heart disease and cancer. Dr. Ovadia says studies have proven that false.

Dr. Ovadia also points out that the carnivore diet is just one type of a low carbohydrate diet, and those diets have been studied. The ketogenic diet and the Atkins diet are other low carbohydrate diets.

"It's not that there are negative studies or positive studies," on the carnivore diet, Dr. Ovadia says. "There just aren't a lot of studies."

Other things to know

Dr. Ovadia says studies and his own experience show the carnivore diet's benefits: reversing or improving diabetes, obesity, autoimmune conditions, inflammatory bowel disease and mental health.

"People on the carnivore diet are often eating once or twice a day and not having snacks because they're not hungry," Dr. Ovadia says. "When you eat nutrient-dense animal foods, you find you're hungry less often."

If you have a medical condition, Dr. Ovadia stresses the need to keep in contact with a health care provider while on the carnivore diet.

“If someone with Type 2 diabetes goes on a very low carbohydrate diet, their medication may need to be adjusted. They’re not taking in carbohydrates, and their blood sugar can get low,” Dr. Ovadia warns. “I often see people with high blood pressure who are on medication that start these diets. Their blood pressure starts to get low, and their medication needs to be adjusted.”

Dr. Ovadia adds that people on the carnivore diet tend to have fewer bowel movements, but this is not usually accompanied by constipation.