

HEALTH & FITNESS

What Really Happens to Your Body When You Ditch Carbs

by [Carrie Dennis](#)



Your body will start breaking down fat and protein stores.

This is called ketosis. "After your body has used up most of your stored carbohydrates, [or] glycogen, it's forced to start breaking down stored fats

and converting them into ketone bodies,” Gorski says. But don’t worry, burning fat stores isn’t a bad thing, so long as you have fat to lose. However, Gorski thinks that breaking down muscle tissue, which can happen when your body doesn’t have carbs and fat to burn, is always a bad thing because it makes you weaker. Carbs spike insulin, which can lead to fat gain via caloric surplus, sure, but it also drives muscle production since it’s an anabolic hormone.



You might need a breath mint.

Something that you don’t see a lot in the conversations about switching to a “keto” diet: The smelly breath. “Ketones are aromatic byproducts of metabolism that cause fruity-smelling breath.” Bontempo says, adding that, on the extreme end, that smell can sometimes turn a little, er, industrial. “Ketoacidosis [a state of very high ketosis] causes more of a nail polish remover odor because of the acetones.”



You could get bad headaches.

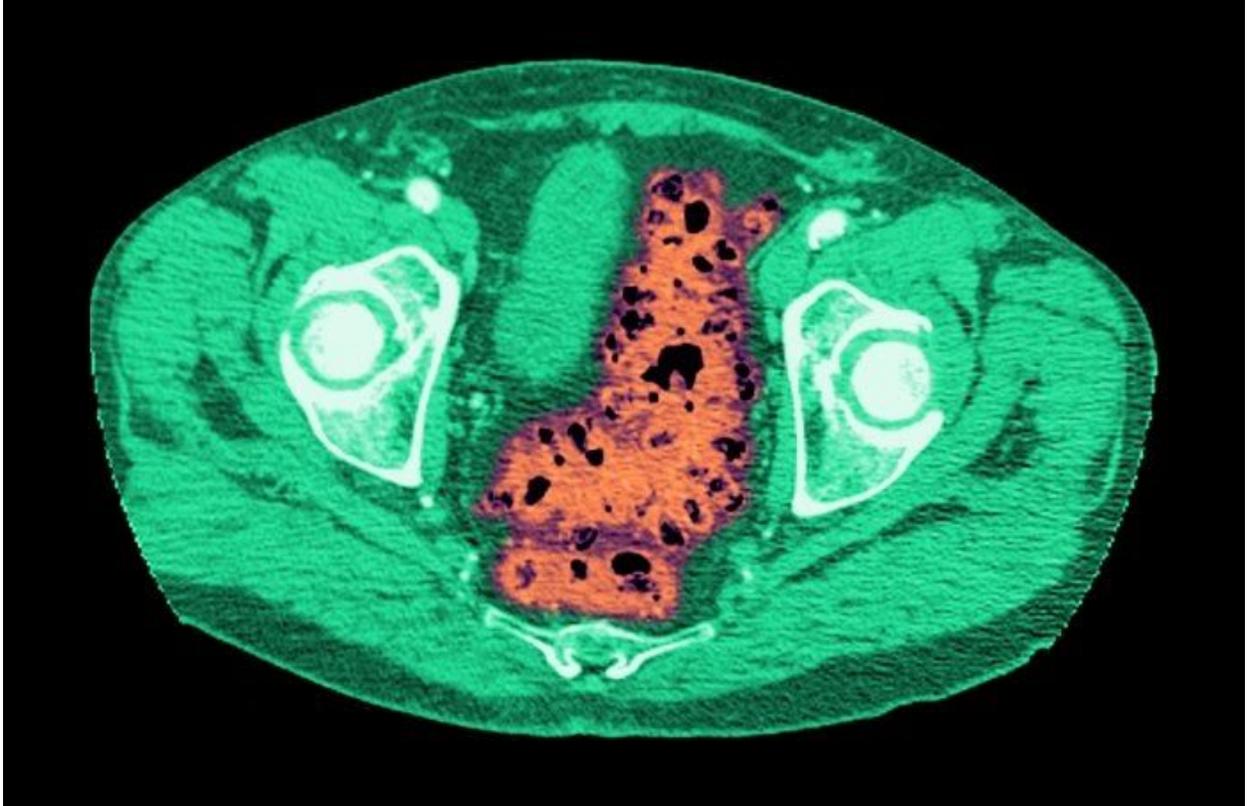
Do you ever get a headache when you haven't had enough water? Then we have bad news: Low-carb diets might dehydrate you. "Water follows carbs, and therefore, when you cut out carbs and deplete your glycogen, water often follows," Gorski says. And with water goes the electrolytes, without which you'll end up with brain fog. Some people might get headaches from ketosis, but that's more of a case-by-case thing.



You may get constipated.

Fiber is crucial, people. "The lack of fiber [in a low-carb diet] also doesn't allow bacteria in the gut to thrive," Bontempo says. Cipullo confirms: "If you are taking in less or no carbs, you are consequently taking in less fluids. A piece of fruit is largely water. Without this source of water, and without the fiber provided by whole grains, legumes and fruits, the GI tract is likely to have less motility. There is much less to stimulate the GI muscles which leads to weakened GI muscles."

That said, your body could go the other direction and leave you running for the toilet. Which way you'll go depends on what else you eat. "If you eat a lot of poor-quality protein and fatty foods or sugar-free foods that have artificial sweeteners and sugar alcohols, then this can cause terrible gas and diarrhea," Bontempo says. Because, according to Gorski, "our pancreas can't produce enough fat-digesting enzymes to break it all down."



You could develop diverticulitis.

Diverticulitis is a condition in which the small pouches in your large intestine get inflamed and infected. This usually only happens when your carb cutting is coupled with a high-protein diet. If this happens, your diarrhea and constipation cycle will continue, but will also be accompanied by cramps and rectal bleeding.



You'll probably get a little moody.

Cognitive function might be delayed because breaking down protein and fat is a longer process than breaking down glucose. Plus, you won't be getting those same sweet dopamine hits that happen to your brain when you eat delicious carbs.



You'll lower your chances for diabetes.

Think about it this way. Processed carbs and added sugars are turned into glucose quickly, which leads to a spike in insulin to try to deal with this spike in glucose, according to Bontempo. "The spike in insulin usually overestimates, forcing blood sugar to drop, leaving you hungry and irritable," she adds. "This cycle leads to cravings, mood swings, feeling sluggish. All this extra insulin over time leads to inflammation, insulin resistance, pre-diabetes, and diabetes." Do the math!



Your hormones might get all banged up.

A low-carb diet might reduce your hormone production, specifically your main thyroid hormone (T3), which regulates your metabolic rate. A low-carb diet can also lead to lowered testosterone and elevated cortisol in men, all of which lead to less energy, slowed metabolism, low sex drive, and impaired immune function, Gorski says.



You might feel more energized — or more lethargic.

This depends on where you're starting. Cipullo explains: "Energy levels vary depending on whether someone was with excess storage on their body versus with adequate or inadequate stores of glycogen and fat. If someone was with excess fat storage, they will likely feel increased energy while someone with too little reserves will feel worse following such a strict diet."

On the flip side, you could be the kind of person who becomes more lethargic. While some people can function better after they've gotten used to the low-carb lifestyle, it doesn't work well for a majority. "It can be especially hard for very active people, as they tend to need more carbohydrates to fuel workouts/training," Gorski says. All three of our experts agree that healthy forms of carbs like beans, lentils, starchy vegetables, and whole grains and proper hydration are the way to go for high and sustained levels of energy.

