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March 1, 2004

Dear Colleagues:

**Happy National Nutrition Month** – and welcome to the March 2004 issue of **Eat Right Montana's Simple Steps for a Healthy Weight**. This month we focus on **balance** – and address the **low-carb boom**.

Boom is probably the best word to describe the phenomenal growth in the low-carb marketplace. From bun-free burgers to complete carb-wise supermarkets, analysts are predicting **\$25 billion** in sales of low-carb products and services for 2004. With potential profits like this, we will undoubtedly see a tidal wave of carb-based advertising.

In the midst of carbo-mania, trying to talk nutrition common-sense can feel like an uphill battle. But, this is when consumers really need a voice of reason and balance – to help them sort through the carbo-confusion and make sensible choices tailored to their situation.

In keeping with our philosophy, we offer some **positive, flexible, and realistic** advice this month about balanced eating, super snacks, and value-added walks. Here are three additional resources with more information to help you combat carbo-craziness:

- **Tufts University Health and Nutrition Letter (December 2003)**  
<http://healthletter.tufts.edu/issues/2003-12/atkins.html>  
Trying, and failing, to make the Atkins Diet healthful
- **UC Berkeley Wellness Letter (January 2004)**  
<http://www.wellnessletter.com/>  
Review of low-carb labeling, ingredients, costs, and taste
- **Nutrition Action HealthLetter (January/February 2004)**  
<http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/coverstory.pdf>  
Comparison and review of popular diets, from low-carb to low-fat

Thanks for your past and future support of **Eat Right Montana**. Your feedback is always important to us; please let us know what you think.

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**Simple Steps for a Healthy Weight: #3. Balance food and activity.  
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**Healthy Families 2004: Finding the healthful middle ground (3<sup>rd</sup> in a series of 12)**

When it comes to dieting and weight loss, Americans tend to go to extremes. Ten years ago everything was low-fat and non-fat. Today we're going crazy for anything with a low-carb label.

"A healthy lifestyle is all about balance," says Katie Bark, registered dietitian (RD) with the Montana Team Nutrition Program. "Diet fads tend to be unbalanced. They focus on rapid weight loss and forget about long-term health. They eliminate entire food groups and forget about physical activity."

There are several problems with America's current 'carbo-phobia' (fear of carbohydrates). One problem is that people eliminate grains, fruits, vegetables, and dairy foods, just because they contain some carbs. When dieters restrict these nutrient-rich foods, they skimp on the fiber, phytonutrients, and calcium that help prevent heart disease, cancer, and osteoporosis.

Another problem, according to Bark, is that low-carb dieters often eat unhealthy amounts of fat. "Eating lots of fat, especially saturated fat, can increase your blood cholesterol and risk of a heart attack. Pork rinds and diet chocolate may be low-carb snacks, but that doesn't mean that they are good for you."

The labeling of low-carb foods is also problematic. There are no legal definitions for low-carb or terms like 'net carbs' and 'effective carbs.' Many low-carb products, like beer and chocolate bars, have the same calories (or more) than the 'regular' version – almost always at a much higher cost.

Nutrition experts agree that it's important to choose carbs wisely. In fact, some aspects of the 'new' low-carb lifestyle have been part of every nutritionist's mantra for years. Eating breakfast, adding protein to snacks, and cutting back on sugar and soft drinks are smart steps in any healthy eating plan.

Eat Right Montana, a statewide coalition promoting healthful eating and active lifestyles, urges Montanans to forget extreme diets and to focus on balance: balancing food intake with activity levels, balancing food throughout the day, and balancing calories from protein, fat, and carbohydrates.

"Choose your carbs, and all your calories, by their nutrient content," says Bark. "For optimal health, enjoy at least three whole grains and five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables every day. For a healthy weight, cut back on empty calories – and get moving."

**ATTACHED: *The Truth about Carb-Claims and Carb-Conscious Snacks***

# The Truth about Low-Carb Products

As America goes crazy for low-carb diets, new terms and claims are popping up on food labels, ads, and menus. Unfortunately, not of all of these terms mean what you might think. Here are some important tips to help you select your carbohydrates wisely.

**Q: Are claims – like low-carb – legal on food packages?**

**A: No; carbohydrate claims have not been approved by the government.**

Technically, a label that says ‘low-carb’ or ‘no-carb’ is violating the law. The Food and Drug Administration has not issued regulations about carbohydrate claims. Companies are supposed to avoid false or misleading statements – but, for now, it is buyer beware.

**Q: What do all these carb terms really mean?**

**A: The current low-carb terminology is essentially meaningless.**

‘Net carbs,’ ‘impact carbs,’ and ‘effective carbs’ do not have standard definitions and no one is checking their accuracy. Companies get these numbers (which are of questionable clinical significance) by subtracting fiber and sugar alcohols from total carbohydrates.

**Q: What are sugar alcohols?**

**A: Made from sugar, these compounds are used to sweeten foods.**

Sugar alcohols (ex., manitol, sorbitol, and xylitol) generally have fewer calories than sugar. They are converted to blood glucose, but at a slower rate than sugar or starch.

**CAUTION:** High intakes of sugar alcohols can cause diarrhea and gas in some people.

**Q: Are low-carb products lower in calories?**

**A: Not necessarily; they can have the same, or higher, calorie levels.**

Since there are no standards or regulations, low-carb items often have as many, or more, calories than their conventional counterparts. Many low-carb candies have more calories and fat than regular candies. Some low-carb beers have just 5 less calories than light beer.

**Q: Are low-carb products better for you than conventional items?**

**A: Not usually; low-carb brownies are no healthier than regular ones.**

Minimally-processed whole foods are the best choices for a healthy weight. These naturally nutrient-rich foods (lots of nutrients per calorie) include whole grains; fruits and vegetables; lean meat, fish and poultry; nuts and legumes; and low-fat dairy foods.

**Q: Why are low-carb products usually so much more expensive?**

**A: Manufacturers will charge a premium price when they can get it.**

Food companies know when they can cash in on hot consumer trends – and low-carb is ‘in’ right now. Be a savvy shopper – and don’t be fooled by prices that are two to four times those for regular products. Save your money for some delicious fresh produce!

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## 12 Nutrient-Rich, Carb-Smart, Super Snacks

A balanced snack can make all the difference in your blood sugar, hunger levels, ability to concentrate, and general attitude. All it takes is some lean protein balanced with nutrient-rich carbohydrates (from whole grains, fruits, or vegetables). Pack at least one super snack into your day – and you'll get an energy boost, long-lasting satisfaction, and the nutrients your body needs to stay strong and healthy.

- 1. Oatmeal with low-fat milk:**  
All it takes is one minute to heat up a bowl of wholesome nutrients and fiber in the microwave.
- 2. Vanilla yogurt with berries:**  
Take one cup of yogurt and stir in half a cup of blueberries, raspberries, or strawberries (frozen or fresh).
- 3. Almonds and dried fruit:**  
Start with a small handful of nuts – and add your favorite dried fruit (raisins, craisins, apricots, or apples).
- 4. Cheddar cheese and an apple:**  
Combine creamy and crunchy, with an ounce of sharp cheese and a crisp Granny Smith for tartness.
- 5. Beef jerky and pea pods:**  
With teriyaki jerky (1-2 ounces), this low-fat treat will taste like a Chinese take-out mini-meal.
- 6. Turkey on multi-grain bread:**  
A slice of smoked turkey, a slice of whole grain bread, a bit of your favorite mustard. Yummy!!
- 7. Peanut butter on bananas:**  
Whether you like creamy or crunchy, a tablespoon or two of PB makes this a perfect snack for kids of all ages.
- 8. Cottage cheese and fruit:**  
Juice-packed, canned fruit goes great with a half cup of cottage cheese. Try pineapple, peaches, or pears.
- 9. Cheese stick and tomatoes:**  
Easy to take anywhere; enjoy a mozzarella cheese stick with sweet cherry or grapes tomatoes.
- 10. Salad with sunflower seeds:**  
Sprinkle a tablespoon of crunchy seeds on leftover salad – and dress lightly with olive oil and vinegar.
- 11. Wheat wrap with cheese:**  
Pick a slice of your favorite cheese and roll it up in a whole wheat tortilla or other flavored wrap.
- 12. Microwave bean soup:**  
Instant soups (or beans and rice combo) make quick, heart-healthy, cold-weather snacks.



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Celebrating  
Healthy Families  
2004

## 12 Ways to Add Value to Your Daily Walk

A daily walk is one of the best ways to maintain a healthy weight. Research also shows that 30 to 45-minutes of brisk walking helps boost your immune system, reduce your risk of disease, and lower your stress level. If these benefits aren't enough to get you off the couch, here are twelve easy ways to make your walking time even more valuable.

- 1. Take a friend:**  
Walking and talking with a friend is good for your body, good for your heart, and good for your soul.
- 2. Take a child:**  
See the world through the eyes of a child – in a stroller, in a wagon, in a backpack, or just hand-in-hand.
- 3. Take a pet:**  
America's pets are facing their own weight crisis. Do your dog a favor – take a long walk together.
- 4. Take a song on CD or tape:**  
Music lightens every step – and makes the time go faster. Pick your favorite tunes and pick up the pace.
- 5. Take a book (on tape):**  
If you need to do two things at once, walking and listening to books on tape is the perfect solution.
- 6. Take a camera:**  
Want to be a better photographer? Make every walk a photo expedition and you'll be a pro in no time.
- 7. Learn about birds:**  
Wherever you walk outdoors, there are birds to watch and hear. Perhaps it's time to start your lifetime list.
- 8. Learn about plants:**  
City parks, country roads, and wilderness trails all have flowers and trees waiting to be enjoyed.
- 9. Learn about geology:**  
With a little reading and a lot of observation, you can learn about the forces that shape our land.
- 10. Learn about history:**  
History is all around us. Use a map or guidebook to learn what happened before your time.
- 11. Learn about your community:**  
Become more informed and more involved by walking around your neighborhood and your town.
- 12. Learn a language:**  
Language tapes or CDs make ideal walking companions – and you can even practice out loud!



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**Celebrating  
Healthy Families  
2004**

# HEALTHY FAMILIES 2004

## Simple Steps for a Healthy Weight

JANUARY 2004

1. Keep a record.

FEBRUARY 2004

2. Develop a routine.

MARCH 2004

3. Balance food and activity.

APRIL 2004

4. Take a daily dose of moderation.

MAY 2004

5. Enjoy variety every day.

JUNE 2004

6. Take time for health every day – at home.

JULY 2004

7. Take time for health every day – at work.

AUGUST 2004

8. Take time for health every day – on vacation.

SEPTEMBER 2004

9. Take time for health every day – at school.

OCTOBER 2004

10. Take time for health every day – around town.

NOVEMBER 2004

11. Take time for health every day – at organizations.

DECEMBER 2004

12. Celebrate the joy of health every day.



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