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# YOUR HEALTH



## Try a New Twist on the Atkins Diet

MAKE TASTY PLANT-BASED MEALS THAT ARE LOW IN CARBS AND SATURATED FATS

By Angela Haupt

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FORMER PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON recently shed more than 20 pounds after adopting a plant-based diet emphasizing legumes, fruits, vegetables, and even almond milk. A study published in September in the

*Annals of Internal Medicine* suggests he has the right idea. The new research indicates a low-carb diet, heavy on proteins and fats from plants, may reduce the risk of death from all medical causes.

"It's no big surprise because the animal-protein diet will have lots of saturated fat and cholesterol, and the plant-based diet will have unsaturated fats, which lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes," says study co-author Walter Willett, chair of the department of nutrition

at the Harvard School of Public Health. The study highlights the so-called Eco-Atkins plan popularized in 2009 by David Jenkins, a nutritional scientist at the University of Toronto, which avoids the saturated animal fats of the original Atkins diet. To follow it, here's what you do:

**Get acquainted with beans.** Dawn Jackson Blatner, a registered dietitian and author of *The Flexitarian Diet*, calls the bean the "glory child" of plant-based protein. Jackson Blatner offers cooks this rule of thumb: A quarter cup of beans of any kind—white, black, pinto, garbanzo—has the same amount of protein as 1 ounce of meat. And you can do almost anything with a soybean product that you can do with a chicken breast. For example, you can baste tofu with barbecue or teriyaki sauce and bake it, grill it, or add it to a veggie stir-fry.

**Try other sources of plant-based protein.** "There's a myth that

it's hard to get enough protein on this kind of diet, and that's not true," says cardiologist Dean Ornish, a physician consultant to Clinton since 1993. Nuts, high-protein vegetables like brussels sprouts, grains like couscous, and lentils are all good sources. One ounce of almonds provides 6 grams of protein—more than 10 percent of a 150-pound person's daily protein needs. And seitan, or wheat gluten, besides being high in protein, has a meaty texture and can be flavored to taste like chicken, sausage, or any spice.

**Ditch dairy drinks.** Plant-based beverages like soy, almond, or rice milks are healthy alternatives to cow's milk. Most are fortified with calcium and vitamin D and are great nutrition sources, says Jackson Blatner.

**Substitute healthy fats for unhealthy ones.** Saturated and trans fats, found in such foods as butter, whole milk, fatty cuts of beef, and hydrogenated vegetable oils, can be harmful. Consider healthier options like omega-3 fatty acids, nut butters, seeds, avocados, and olives. Try vegetable oils, like canola, flaxseed, and walnut, for cooking and for salad dressings or toppings.

**Choose carbs wisely.** There are good carbs and bad carbs. Starchy foods like white bread, rice, potatoes, and baked goods top the Eco-Atkins "don't eat" list, while fruits, vegetables, whole-grain breads, and oats are recommended. When opting for carbs, veggies are best—try okra and eggplant, which are particularly low in starch.

**Reinvent your favorites.** If you like burritos, try substituting black beans for beef or switching garbanzo beans or edamame for poultry. White beans can replace meat in spaghetti sauce and other Italian foods, says Jackson Blatner, who further suggests trying pinto beans and black beans in Mexican dishes, and garbanzos in Asian stir-fries and Mediterranean meals.

**Remember that it's not all or nothing.** Willett suggests trying moderate dietary tweaks, like snacking on a whole-grain cracker with peanut butter as opposed to a chunk of cheese or a slice of bologna. "It doesn't have to be really strict—nutrition has a lot to do with trade-offs," he says. Just a few days a week of swapping out meat in favor of plant protein can make a difference. ●



## Take the Obama Challenge

SIGN UP TO EARN THE PRESIDENTIAL FITNESS AWARD

By Deborah Kotz

**2** Remember when you were a schoolkid running a mile and groaning through push-ups to meet the president's physical fitness challenge? Now you can sign up for the Obama version of the program, along with your own kids. The latest challenge, part of first lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" initiative to end childhood obesity, aims to get 1 million children and their parents on their feet and moving daily. Stick it out for two months or so and you earn an official Presidential Active Lifestyle Award.

The PALA challenge requires adults to exercise for 30 minutes a day—kids, for an hour—five days a week for six out of eight weeks. Or you can wear a pedometer and count your daily steps (adult target: 8,500; kids' target: 11,000 for girls and 13,000 for boys). Sign up for free at [www.fitness.gov](http://www.fitness.gov), where you can also log your activities. Online fitness tests can help

you assess your endurance, muscle strength, and flexibility, and measure the progress you're making with your workouts.

The website includes a list of over 100 White House-approved activities, from juggling to calisthenics to throwing darts to Nintendo Wii (sports). Kenneth Cooper, a physician known as the "father of aerobics" who heads the

Cooper Aerobics Center in Dallas, is skeptical about the fitness value of some of the activities. "Darts? Fishing? I find it hard to believe you can get a good workout

with those," he says, though he's all for PALA if it motivates people to break a sweat. "Research has shown that the one thing that best predicts how long people live is their level of fitness," Cooper says. People who meet the PALA challenge, and fitness buffs who need a bigger one, can set their sights on the Presidential Champions award; the more you work out, the more points you get. Forty thousand wins a bronze medal, 1 million gets you platinum. ●

**THE AIM IS TO GET 1 MILLION PEOPLE ON THEIR FEET AND MOVING DAILY.**