Carb Cutting: The American Dream

Walking through the hallways of a gym, standing in the locker rooms across America it is near impossible to not hear the murmurings of the elusive carb-cutting regimen unfortunately so many have adopted. The belief that carbohydrates are the enemy that plague our progress, that hinder our ability to reach those lofty fitness goals; I die a little inside each time I hear these musings. Let’s practice a new mantra:

“simple and complex carbohydrates keep me running, processed carbohydrate and sugars will slowly and surely kill me”

By all means this should sound slightly counterintuitive; food can be made up of carbohydrates (in addition to fats and proteins). Many have been told for years that carbohydrates are the enemy, the cause of America’s growing waistline. Dietary programs exist focusing on their elimination. Countless recipes can be found online that claim to be carbohydrate free (if only they understood biology…) using instead chemically engineered sugars. Carbs have been focused as the demon, the evil archetype, the Hitler of macronutrients; Americans, through all these crazy dietary plans, have ostracized carbohydrates and created quite the negative connotation concerning their consumption. Crossfit (sorry, will be picking on this population) vehemently support the Paleo diet, that argues that grains should be removed from the diet and one should consume what our caveman ancestors used to consume. Excuse me while I yell from the top of my lunges “WHYYYY?!” Cavemen also slept in caves and were amazed by the concept of fire. Yes, our bodies have not evolved extensively since cavemen and remained relatively the same throughout, seeing evolution primarily in that space between your ears. Yes, our bodies still think we live like caveman (nomadic) and are not aware we live in a technologically driven society, or even aware that society exists. But that wonderful part of evolution that has occurred within our brains has provided a far greater understanding of the world around us as well as the world within us. Yes, we should not be eating a multitude of processed goods. Yes, we should not be gaining most of our essential nutrients from supplements or daily vitamins. But this mentality of cutting out grains needs to stop. The phrase breaking bread has been around since biblical times; we reach this point in history as a species thus far eating grain, why the desire to cut it out now?

Carbs are the fuel source for half of the energy systems within the human body. Your brain runs off of carbs; without glucose (in the form of glucagon) your brain does not function. In addition, if the brain is dead (has no glucogen) no matter how much energy is in the body, working out will provide zero gains and no results will occur from training. You can bust your ass and put a great amount of effort into a workout, but if the brain has no energy no physiological changes will occur. You will have essentially wasted your time and actually delayed progress as your body now needs to spend more time recovering from this little bout. Moral of the story: your brain needs and loves carbs! Don’t deny what it needs!! Now the real question, what are the right carbs and what are the wrong carbs?

It’s much easier to answer what carbohydrates are not good to consume than what carbohydrates are worth consuming. So let’s start with the big No-No’s! Processed carbs tend to remove the nutrients from the substance and replace it with junk that allows for the “food” to sit on shelves longer to before going bad. Good ol’ shelf life! We also want to stay away from carbs with minimal nutrients. Foods doused in sugar with little fiber should be avoided; although the brain loves glucose, the body doesn’t! We want the sugar we consume to be integral part of the food, rather than a substance that was extracted and then chemically integrated. Back to focusing on the positives aka what we should try to consume!

Raw, organic carbs; grains, unprocessed wheat, flaxseed, fruits and veggies are all wonderful sources of carbohydrates. Complex carbs and grains are your friends! Fruits and veggies are filled with the right carbs; their design within the composition of the veggie/fruit allows for slower processing of the sugars making it more likely that it is used as a fuel source and less likely to be converted into adipose and stored for later “use.”

**Why does all of this matter? Why should I give a flying phuck?**

The greater the understanding of how something works, the greater the ability for an individual to harness the full potential of that system. The more you understand about how your body works, the easier it is for you to work with your body instead of fighting tooth and nail. If you understand how carbohydrates are utilized in the body, you are more likely to make educated decisions regarding your nutrients. The biggest hurdle isn’t the actual process of reaching your goals; it’s having a proper understanding of where you should be going. By starting with a proper roadmap and directions on how to reach your respective goals, the easier it becomes to shift that focus from how horribly difficult you find losing 40 lbs and reaching your goal to a perspective that enjoys the struggle and tribulation that naturally occurs when working for something we desire. If it was easy, why would we do it?

**So where do I start?**

Start small! The best way to know if a behavior needs to be modified is to know the full extent of the behavior. For a week keep a simple food journal where you record what you eat; not what is in the food, not how many calories, merely a list of what you consuming. After a week, look back through the list and look for the bad carbs that you’ve consumed and circle them. First task is to reduce the frequency of consumption by 30% OR to replace 30% of those choices with good ones. And this is where we can introduce your mantra for success! Reduce, Replace, Replicate. Again, start small and remove one of two bad choices a WEEK. Rome was not built in a day and neither will your new dietary patterns. The tortoise had it right that slow and steady wins the race, especially concerning your overall health. Slow, steady, and consistent changes to your eating habits will create long term behavioral changes. And if you get lost along the way or falter, well, that’s what this benevolent dictator is here for! To hopefully provide that little extra encouragement you need, provide that information that allows you to make informed, educated decisions concerning your fitness health.