



GLP-1 drugs and low-carb diets leave Americans short on fiber as protein craze grows, experts warn

By Peter Burke

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Protein is practically everywhere. From protein coffee to protein-labeled desserts, grocery shelves now market the nutrient as a shorthand for "healthy."

On social media, influencers promote high-protein meal plans while warning followers to cut back on carbohydrates to lose weight, preserve muscle or adjust to the appetite-suppressing effects of GLP-1 medications.

The shift comes as GLP-1 drugs reshape eating habits and high-protein branding expands across the food industry.

MARTHA STEWART'S CARDIOLOGIST SAYS A SIMPLE SMOOTHIE ADD-IN IS LIKE 'TAKING OZEMPIC'

At the same time, the newly released Dietary Guidelines for Americans place renewed emphasis on limiting added sugars and refined grains — guidance that some consumers and influencers interpret as support for lower-carbohydrate eating patterns.

But some nutrition experts say that interpretation risks oversimplifying what carbohydrates are — and how they function as part of a healthy diet.



The new Dietary Guidelines for Americans place renewed emphasis on limiting added sugars and refined grains. (realfood.gov)

"I think first and foremost, it's important for us to talk about what a carbohydrate is," Florida registered dietitian nutritionist Lee Cotton told Fox News Digital.

MEDITERRANEAN CHEF TOUTS 'LIQUID GOLD' IN PANTRY FOR HEART HEALTH AND WEIGHT LOSS BENEFITS

"I think the illusion is [that it's] just pasta and croissants and doughnuts."

That perception, she argued, ignores the fact that carbohydrates include fruits, vegetables and whole grains — foods that provide fiber, vitamins and other essential nutrients.



Florida dietitian nutritionist Lee Cotton said carbohydrates also include fruits and vegetables — something many people may forget. (Lindsey Potter)

The new dietary guidelines say Americans should "prioritize fiber-rich whole grains" and "significantly reduce the consumption of highly processed, refined carbohydrates, such as white bread, ready-to-eat or packaged breakfast options, flour tortillas and crackers."

Low-carb messaging has grown alongside the rapid adoption of GLP-1 medications such as Ozempic and Wegovy.

These drugs suppress appetite and slow gastric emptying, helping many patients reduce caloric intake and, in clinical studies,

achieve significant weight loss and improved metabolic markers.

INTERMITTENT FASTING MAY BE NO BETTER THAN 'DOING NOTHING,' MAJOR REVIEW FINDS

"I believe in modern medicine," she said. "But with these medications, we are stepping away from really [noticing] how our bodies feel and that innate capability for our bodies to feel hunger and satiety."

Appetite suppression, she warned, can make it easier to overlook balanced nutrition.

In her new book "A Nourishing Perspective," released earlier this month, Cotton cautions that overly restricting carbs may lead to low energy, digestive issues or nutrient gaps for some individuals.



Cotton cautioned that appetite suppression among GLP-1 users could lead some people to overlook balanced nutrition. (Lindsey Potter)

"If eliminating carbs worked long-term for most people, we wouldn't keep reinventing low-carb diets every five years," Cotton told Fox News Digital.

Meanwhile, protein has been elevated to what Cotton calls the "golden child of diet culture."

She writes in her book, "It's promoted as the most important macronutrient, but this little trophy winner is no more important than any other nutrient for overall health and wellness."

PEOPLE LOST WEIGHT WHILE EATING SIGNIFICANTLY MORE FOOD — HERE'S THE SECRET

The apparent tension reflects a broader divide in how dietary guidance is interpreted. While federal recommendations emphasize improving carbohydrate quality and overall eating patterns, some popular diet approaches focus more directly on reducing total carbohydrate intake.

Dallas-based dietitian Whitney Stuart said protein and carbs serve complementary roles in a healthy diet.



There has been an increased emphasis on protein, but some health experts say protein is no more or less important than carbs. (iStock)

"When we talk about protein and carbohydrates, I believe they work best together rather than being treated equally," she told Fox News Digital.

"Think of protein as the building block that helps you feel full, while carbohydrates — especially those high in fiber — provide

essential energy, support your digestive health and help keep your metabolism on track."

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Stuart said she believes the focus should shift from low-carb diets to emphasizing high-fiber carbs.

"The real issue for many Americans isn't that we eat too many carbs," she said. "It's that we don't get enough fiber."



A nutritionist told Fox News Digital that most Americans aren't getting enough fiber in their diets. (iStock)

Carlo Filippone, the New Jersey-based founder of the Chicken Pound meal prep company, said Americans should look at the new food pyramid as a "protein-first" approach.

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"Fill your plate with protein, add veggies next and complex carbs last and least," he told Fox News Digital.

"Refined carbs should be a once-in-a-while indulgence."



The founder of a chicken-based meal prep company said Americans should view the new food pyramid as a "protein-first" approach. (iStock)

Some clinicians have raised concerns about muscle loss among patients who significantly reduce calories without adequate protein.

This concern has been noted among some who take GLP-1 medications, underscoring the importance of maintaining sufficient

protein intake even as overall food consumption declines.

Overly restricting carbs may lead to low energy, digestive issues or nutrient gaps for some individuals.

"The essence of a great nutrition pattern is adequacy, variety and balance when it comes to eating," Cotton said.

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Cotton's message is less about defending carbs than restoring proportion.



Cotton told Fox News Digital that adequacy, variety and balance are the "essence of a great nutrition pattern." (Lindsey Potter)

"Carbohydrates are not always the villain," she said.

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"I think like anything else in life, it's just particularly what your choices are and how they impact your health."

Peter Burke is a lifestyle editor with Fox News Digital. He covers various lifestyle topics, with an emphasis on food and drink.

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