

**MEDIA STATEMENT ISSUED BY CENTRE FOR EVIDENCE-BASED HEALTH CARE,  
STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY, CAPE TOWN**

**Low carbohydrate diets result in similar weight losses to recommended balanced diets**

*Findings debunk claims that low carbohydrate diets result in more weight loss*

**Cape Town, 9 July 2014** - Low carbohydrate diets result in similar weight losses when compared to recommended balanced diets, according to researchers at Stellenbosch University.

The study, published in the online journal [PLOS ONE](#), pooled the results of 19 clinical trials that met specific criteria and measured weight loss and heart disease risk factors such as blood cholesterol levels. This study included 3,209 overweight and obese participants, some with diabetes.

“This systematic review shows that when the amount of energy consumed by people following the low carbohydrate and balanced diets was similar, there was no difference in weight loss after 3 to 6 months and after 1 to 2 years in those with and without diabetes”, said lead researcher Dr Celeste Naudé from the Centre for Evidence-based Health Care at Stellenbosch University’s Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences.

Low carbohydrate diets reduce energy (kilojoule) intake by avoiding starchy foods (such as oats, bread, rice, potatoes, beans and lentils), and by restricting certain vegetables (such as butternut and carrots) and most fruits. The diets recommend people eat as much fat as they want, especially animal fats, or as much protein as they like, or both. When following extreme forms of these diets, around 80% of a person’s energy can come from fat alone. High fat and protein intake is known to reduce hunger leading to less food intake and thus less energy intake.

By contrast, a balanced weight loss diet reduces energy intake by guiding healthy food choices and decreasing portion sizes, while keeping the carbohydrate, protein and fat within the recommended ranges of intake. A balanced diet includes plenty of vegetables and fruit, with intake of unrefined carbohydrates (such as oats, brown rice, whole grains, sweet potato and beans) and emphasises vegetable and fish fats and oils instead of animal fats, as well as lean proteins (such as lean meats, fish and seafood, poultry and lower fat dairy). Large studies over long time periods show that this diet pattern ensures that all nutrient requirements are met and reduces the risk of chronic lifestyle diseases.

“Weight loss occurs, irrespective of whether the diet is low carbohydrate or balanced, and there is little or no difference in weight loss or changes in heart disease risk factors and diabetes markers up to two years of follow-up”, said Professor Jimmy Volmink, co-author and Dean of the Faculty.

Dr Vash Mungal-Singh, Chief Executive Officer of the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa said: "This study clears up the misperception that low carbohydrate diets are more effective for weight loss. It is important to note that heart disease and stroke develop over many years of exposure to unhealthy diets and other risk factors such as smoking, obesity, high alcohol intake and inactivity. The follow-up of these

weight loss trials is no longer than two years, which is too short to provide an adequate picture of the long term risk of following a low carbohydrate diet.”

**Ends**

The full article is available from [PLOS ONE](#)

A summary of the article is available from the [CEBHC](#)

### Media enquiries

Author

Dr Celeste Naudé

+27 (0)21 938 9886

[cenaude@sun.ac.za](mailto:cenaude@sun.ac.za)

Centre for Evidence-based Health Care

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

Stellenbosch University

Marketing Coordinator

Mandi Barnard

+27 (0)21 938 9505

[mandi@sun.ac.za](mailto:mandi@sun.ac.za)

Marketing Office

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

Stellenbosch University

### Additional resources

Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa

Jessica Byrne

+27 (0)21 447 6268

[jessica@heartfoundation.co.za](mailto:jessica@heartfoundation.co.za)

Association for Dietetics in South Africa

Jackie Busch

+27 (0)82 376 4446

[jackie@liquidlingo.co.za](mailto:jackie@liquidlingo.co.za)

Nutrition Society of South Africa

Prof Nelia Steyn

[npsteyn@hsrc.ac.za](mailto:npsteyn@hsrc.ac.za)

Chronic Disease Initiative for Africa

Prof Krisela Steyn

+27 (0)21 406 6802

[krisela.steyn@uct.ac.za](mailto:krisela.steyn@uct.ac.za)

Professional Board for Dietetics and Nutrition of the HPCSA

Prof Edelweiss Wentzel-Viljoen

+27 (0)18 299 2467

[edelweiss.wentzel-viljoen@nwu.ac.za](mailto:edelweiss.wentzel-viljoen@nwu.ac.za)

---

**This was a collaborative research project between authors from the following institutions:**

---



The Centre for Evidence-based Health Care (CEBHC) is a coordinating and directive institution for research and training of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences of Stellenbosch University in the field of evidence-based health care.

<http://www.sun.ac.za/cebhc>



The Effective Health Care Research Consortium is funded by UKaid from the UK Government Department for International Development to increase the number of decisions relating to the health sector that are based on reliable evidence to benefit the poor in middle and low income countries.

<http://www.evidence4health.org/index.htm>



The South African Cochrane Centre (SACC) is part of the international Cochrane Collaboration that is a non-profit organization operating worldwide, which disseminates up-to-date reviews on the effects of healthcare interventions in order to help people make well-informed decisions. <http://www.mrc.ac.za/cochrane/>



The Division of Human Nutrition at the University of Cape Town focuses on the professional training of dietitians at Honours level, offering Masters and PhD programmes in nutrition and dietetics, research, nutrition policy development and social responsibility activities. <http://mig.humannutrition.uct.ac.za>