

# Doctors favor South Beach over Atkins diet

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Of the low-carb diet plans out there, Atkins and South Beach appear to lead the pack.

Both are popular, both have physician founders — although one, Robert Atkins, died last year — and both induce the rapid weight-loss dieters want to see.

But whether lost pounds will stay off remains another matter.

Many physicians and nutritionists, along with a number of specialty groups that include the American Dietetic Association and the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, weigh in on the side of caution, citing possible health risks from too few carbohydrates, especially to the heart and to the kidneys.

Still, of the two diets, South Beach gets higher marks overall.

One reason is the "induction"

period, in which dieters are urged to follow a high-protein, restrictive low-carbohydrate diet, is much longer in Atkins than in South Beach.

While South Beach dieters restrict carbohydrate intake to about 20 grams daily for two weeks, those on Atkins do so "for as long as you feel necessary and can tolerate the menu," said Cindy Heroux, a registered dietitian in the Orlando area.

The resulting metabolic state, known as ketosis, occurs in either dietary approach, as the body turns to fat stores instead of carbohydrates for energy, inducing quick weight loss.

But critics argue that being in ketosis too long raises the health risks and potential complications, turning the blood acidic and robbing the body of essential nutrients, such as folic acid, found in grains.

"Any diet that encourages you to get into ketosis and stay there is dangerous," said Amy Lanou, a scientist who is the nutrition director for the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine in Washington, D.C.

"Of the two, I would rather see someone on South Beach than Atkins," because South Beach, while it's still "too high in animal protein," adds back vegetables and fruits more quickly, she said.

Heroux, who is a voluntary spokeswoman for the American Heart Association, agreed.

Calling Atkins her "least favorite" of all the low-carb diets, she suggested South Beach, by the final phase, is an "excellent diet" — high in complex carbohydrates and healthy fats, like olive oils

and canola oil, rather than the saturated fats allowed in Atkins.

However, Dr. Joel Fuhrman, a family-practice physician in Flemington, N.J., with an expertise in nutrition, illustrated how divided opinions in the field can be.

Fuhrman sees no value added in any low-carb diet.

"Saying South Beach is not as dangerous as Atkins is no badge of honor," he stressed. "That's like saying snorting cocaine for one month is not as bad as two."

Americans already eat a "terrible diet," with 40 percent of daily calories coming from meat or meat-based products, he said. Yet the healthiest societies thrive on diets high in "natural plant food, not processed foods." ■

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**FOOD MAKERS RESPOND.** Food companies are trying hard to fit the low-carb diet craze into their familiar product lines, **Business, 1C.**