

The Pritikin Diet – Low Fat, High Carbohydrate and Still Popular.

One of the earliest “low-fat” diets to hit the arena, the Pritikin diet continues to promise health benefits to individuals.

The Pritikin Diet has been around since the 1970s. Starting with the first Pritikin Longevity Center in Santa Barbara, California in 1976, Nathan Pritikin, the center’s founder, developed a diet low in fat and high in complex carbohydrates for participants to follow. One of the earliest widely promoted “low-fat” diets, the Pritikin diet continues to promise weight loss, cholesterol- and triglyceride-lowering benefits, decreased blood pressure and overall wellness.

History

Since the early 1970s when Nathan Pritikin developed the Pritikin Program, his centers have incorporated scientific findings and encouraged ongoing research into the benefits for followers of the diet. After two-and-a-half decades, over 65 clinical studies have been published evaluating the Pritikin Program in such respected medical journals as the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Considered innovative and cutting-edge at its inception, the Pritikin Program encompasses two components key to achieving health benefits and weight loss – diet and exercise. The American public is now well-familiar with the combination of diet and exercise in most weight-loss programs today.

As the first Pritikin Longevity Center outgrew its facilities in Santa Barbara due to its increasing popularity, the Pritikin Longevity Center moved to Santa Monica, where it continues to be located and added another center in Aventura, Florida. Today, Nathan Pritikin’s son, Robert, directs the Pritikin Longevity Center in Santa Monica, continuing the work of his father. Today, the diet is called the Pritikin Lifetime Eating Plan, but largely emphasizes the very same combination of a very low-fat diet combined with exercise - a program he promises in his book is *made even easier*.

So what is the Pritikin diet?

Because the Pritikin Program emphasizes lifestyle changes, it is not a diet alone but includes regular exercise, as well. The Pritikin Diet (or *Pritikin Lifetime Eating Plan*, as it is called today) is the nutritional/dietary component of the program. It is a very low-fat diet, quite in-line with the message Americans have been receiving throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, but very unlike the high protein, low carbohydrate craze of the later 1990s and today.

The Pritikin Diet has two daily caloric ranges, 1000 and 1200, with 10% or less of the total calories coming from fat. The typical American Diet averages between 35-45% fat and the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends a diet with approximately 30% of total calories coming from fat. The Pritikin Diet

recommends the removal of *all* added fat in the diet such as oils, butter and margarine, stating that since all foods have some fat, the daily diet would already provide 5-10% of the total calories. (Other scientific research today challenges diets with such low levels of fat in demonstrating that diets *too* low in fat may also have adverse health effects.)

The Pritikin Diet is not only very low in fats, but low in cholesterol, protein, and highly refined carbohydrates. The diet is high in complex carbohydrates (75-80% of total daily calories), emphasizing whole foods that are eaten raw or cooked. Below is a table showing the specific components of the Pritikin Diet as compared to the general recommendations advised by the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the American Dietetic Association as well as to the typical American diet today.

	<i>Pritikin Lifetime Eating Plan</i>	<i>General Dietary Recommendations</i>	<i>Typical American Diet</i>
Fat/% calories per day	10 or less	30 or less	35-45
Protein/% calories per day	10-15	15-20	10-15
Carbohydrates/% calories per day	75-80	50-55	40-45
Cholesterol, mg/day	100 or less	300 or less	450-500
Fiber, grams/day	35 or more	25-30	10-15
Sodium, mg/day	1,600 or less	2400	3500-6500

The Pritikin Diet is not a vegetarian diet, but meat and fish intake is restricted and carbohydrates, fruits and vegetables are emphasized. The caloric levels recommended are considered minimal levels to meet nutritional needs if followed carefully. Medical supervision is recommended for any diet less than 1200 calories. As with any major dietary change, it is advisable to consult a Registered Dietitian before doing so.

Is this diet right for everyone?

Considered by some a pioneer in showing links with diet and chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol, heart disease and many other life-threatening diseases, Pritikin suggests that the Pritikin Program can be a beneficial for anyone at risk of chronic disease or needing to lose weight. Since the Pritikin Diet recommends a *very* low fat diet – well below the 30% recommended from other healthy diet programs, one should consult a Registered Dietitian or other health care professional before and during such a program.

What can I expect?

The Pritikin Program, like many other diets, promises weight loss without hunger or calorie counting. Strict followers of the diet have seen cholesterol lowering of

up to 25% in 3 weeks. Participants at the Pritikin Longevity Centers experience an *average* of 13 pounds weight loss in the first month.

The program is reported to reduce stress and promote energy through an easy-to-follow program of diet and exercise. Other benefits reported through research show a gradual decrease in reliance on certain prescription medications and decreased need for insulin in diabetics over time.

Other information.

With over 70,000 participants already having gone through the program in past two-and-a-half decades, the Pritikin Longevity Centers today offer 1, 2 and multiple week programs consisting of medical supervision, blood tests with progress, exercise, diet and cooking classes. Several books have been published on the program, many with weekly plans and numerous recipes to follow at home.

When considering this or any dietary change, be sure to consult a Registered Dietitian and obtain proper medical supervision.

References:

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