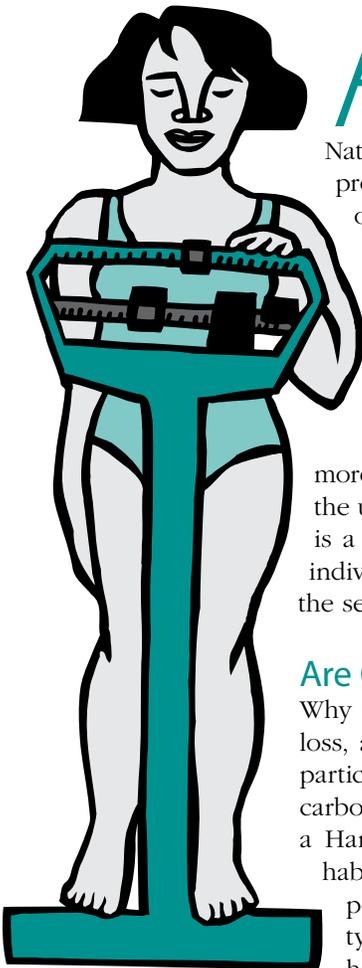
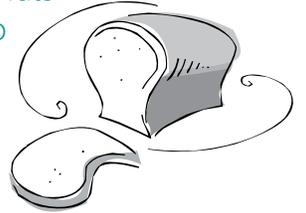


# 5-HTP

## Control Those Carbs

by Margy Squires

**Eating never seemed so difficult in the “good old days”.** You plant, harvest, eat. But today it seems that one food or another is on a “do not eat or die” list. Move over trans fats because butter is in. Saccharin is still out but we’re undecided about soy. Egg yolks no longer raise dietary cholesterol. In the past few years, carbohydrates appear to be on the top of the “no” list. Although Atkins made the high protein, low carb diet famous, moderations of the South Beach Diet made it healthier. So do you put carbs on your plate or not?



**A**mericans are growing fatter every year, with 62% considered overweight or obese. The growing waistline of the American public is scaring even the government. If we continue the eating trend, despite the fact that we’re always dieting, for the first time in history our children may not outlive us. According to a press release in January 2006 from the National Institute of Health, (NIH), “Obesity and type 2 diabetes have become major public health problems in this country. Less than half of American adults are at a healthy weight. Approximately one-third of American adults are obese and an additional one-third are overweight and at risk for becoming obese. Alarmingly, approximately 16 percent of children and teens ages six to 19 are also overweight. Overweight and obesity increase the risk of developing numerous, serious health problems, including heart disease and type 2 diabetes.”

Fast forward to 2013. The obesity statistic for ages six to 19 is 33%; adults 68%, prompting the largest physician organization in the U.S., the American Medical Association to officially deem obesity a disease at its annual meeting in June. Proponents believe the move will prompt more medical attention. Opponents argue it may drive more drug and surgical options but not fix the underlying lifestyle changes that need to be made to help people be healthier. Whether obesity is a disease or not, those opposed are correct in saying the choice to be healthier has to be an individual one. Looking at what you do eat is the first step; if you can add exercise to the plan, it’s the second step.

### Are Carbs to Blame?

Why the hit on carbs? When it comes to weight loss, a calorie is a calorie, right? Apparently not, particularly when it comes to the three major foods: carbohydrates, protein and fats. In February 2006, a Harvard study looked at the long-term dietary habits of 85,000 women and found that eating potatoes could increase your risk of developing type 2 diabetes. It seems the poor potato has a high glycemic index, meaning it can raise blood sugar rapidly. Constantly eating foods high in this

index – typically carbohydrates – may damage the ability of the pancreas to produce insulin, a hormone that controls blood sugar levels. In another study, researchers compared an increase in fat vs. an increase in carbs calorie-wise and dieters lost more weight on a higher fat diet. Both of these studies implicate carbs. The one fact that experts do agree on is that if you consume more calories than you’re burning off, you’ll gain, not lose, weight.

If you’ve read any of my previous articles on diet, you know that this author advocates carbs, particularly those close to nature (fruits, veggies, whole grains).

### Health Risks of Overweight & Obesity

- ◆ type 2 diabetes
- ◆ heart disease
- ◆ high blood pressure
- ◆ nonalcoholic fatty liver disease
- ◆ osteoarthritis
- ◆ some types of cancer: breast, colon, endometrial & kidney
- ◆ stroke

Source: [win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/PDF](http://win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/PDF)

Continued

## 5-HTP: Control Those Carbs

*continued*

These complex carbs give you a feeling of fullness and feeling more satisfied for a longer period of time, partly because their increased fiber takes longer to digest. Most of them will also have a lower glycemic index which helps keep blood sugar levels more constant and under control. Bottom line: change your type of carbs instead of putting them on the “do not eat or die” list.

### Addicted to Carbs?

Your body needs complex carbs as fuel. However, too many of us have reached for simple carbs which convert faster to sugar: fruit juice instead of the fruit, white bread instead of high fiber, pasta over whole grain spelt. Or worse, we reach for soda, cookies and other empty nutrients, high sugar laden foods which spike sugar highs and temporary energy bursts. But what goes up must come down and we reach for more sugar to “sustain the feeling”. That’s what addiction is all about. Since craving carbs may be physiologically an addiction, weaning away from that high can leave you in withdrawal fatigue, depression and feeling intensely irritated.



### 5-HTP Curbs Cravings

Changing your eating habits to include more complex carbs and reduce high glycemic foods is a process. The desire to eat often overwhelms our best intentions. Sometimes food just makes us feel good; we savor every delicious bite. For instance, caffeine and alcohol temporarily raise serotonin levels in the brain, a hormone that makes us feel happy and satisfied but they are potentially addictive foods and not necessarily healthy (well, maybe organic red wine with polyphenols is). A better choice is to supplement with 5-hydroxytryptophan or 5-HTP, a precursor to “feel good” serotonin.

Multiple studies show that people who dieted with 5-HTP not only lost weight, they did it without the “crabby diet syndrome”. Participants took 100 mg of 5-HTP 20-30 minutes before a meal. They were less hungry so they ate less, and felt satisfied longer, which kept them on track. 5-HTP is also safe to take over a long period of time if you happen to be trying to lose weight (see caution). Some study participants increased 5-HTP to 200 mg before meals, three times per day. Diabetics who must watch sugar intake may find 5-HTP helpful as well. One interesting finding for women is that our brains have less serotonin than men’s do. Go figure—we’re the ones always on a diet!



You can use 5-HTP in a manner similar to the dieters to successfully make carb changes. *Again, a reminder to never drastically alter a diet in a short period of time!* Your body is a system of organs, cells and tissues that work together and it’s easier to adjust to small, consistent changes than big,

## Quick Q’s

### Q What benefits can I expect from 5-HTP?

If you are serotonin deficient, a shortage may affect your endocrine function, which may cause depressed mood and cravings for simple carbohydrates (alcohol, sugar, pasta). Balancing the serotonin level may reduce cravings, and lift mood. If you have sleep interruption, especially around 1-3 a.m. when the serotonin-melatonin process kicks in, chances are your low levels don’t produce enough to make melatonin, which regulates your sleep cycle.

### Q How much 5-HTP do I take?

The dose varies, depending on which symptoms you are trying to help. For cravings, 100 mg one hour before meals in clinical trials may assist weight loss. Taking 50-100 mg before bedtime has been shown to help sleep. In most studies, people reported an elevation of mood and overall feeling better about themselves even when not diagnosed with a clinical depression. Sleep studies on 5-HTP report an increase in REM sleep (Wyatt, Zarone). Noted naturopathic, Michael Murray N.D., suggests 100-300 mg taken 30-40 minutes before bedtime for at least three days. Increase to 600 mg if the lower dose is not enough or add other herbs such as valerian or passion flower to 5-HTP.

drastic ones. With 5-HTP, you can make a gradual switch and put carbs back on the “eat it and be healthy” list!



*Caution: If you are taking a selective serotonin or norephedrine re-uptake inhibitor (SSRI, SNRI) do not take 5-HTP without medical supervision. Excessive sleepiness is one sign of too much serotonin.*

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