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The Atkins Diet

Origins, principles, and the truth about Dr. Robert Atkins' death

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ABSTRACT

The author presents the Atkins diet, created by Robert Atkins in 1972, as a ketogenic diet that drastically restricts carbohydrates (10 to 20 g per day) and derives most of its calories from animal proteins and fats. He explains the mechanism of ketosis, whereby the body begins to use body fat for energy and reduces the sensation of hunger, allowing binge eating to be controlled and weight loss to occur without caloric restriction or fasting. The text is devoted above all to dispelling the rumor that Atkins died because of his own diet: medical reports indicate that he developed cardiomyopathy from a viral illness and died, at the age of 72, of head trauma after slipping on ice. The author attributes the distortion to vegan groups and the press, citing Newsweek magazine's retraction in 2007.

KEYWORDS: *atkins diet; ketogenic diet; ketosis; carbohydrates; weight loss; robert atkins*

Dr. Robert Atkins described the diet that bears his name in 1972 in his book "Dr. Atkins' Diet Revolution," restricting carbohydrate intake to 10 to 20 g per day. The Atkins diet is a ketogenic diet that induces ketosis without restricting protein, fluids, or calories, and without requiring fasting or hospitalization. In his day, Atkins founded a center for the treatment of obesity in New York. The diet consists essentially of drastically reducing dietary carbohydrate intake, with 98% of the daily calories consumed coming from animal proteins and fats. When the diet begins, according to Atkins, the body's metabolism undergoes a change and starts using body fat rather than carbohydrates for energy. In this process, also known as ketosis, the body is induced not to feel hunger, since there is no limit on caloric intake. Atkins recommends eating until sufficiently satisfied, but without feeling "stuffed." This makes it possible to control binge eating while also inducing weight loss. Taking a multivitamin is essential to the success of the diet.

The Atkins diet has been cited in 89,000 articles in a Google Scholar search. According to the first reports, when he died in 2003 at the age of 72, Atkins weighed 116 kg and stood 1.8 m tall. Naturally, the rumor arose that he had died from his own diet, tarnishing the ketogenic diet. I remember it vividly, because his death occurred in the year I began my medical residency in general surgery, and the comments in medical circles were always negative toward the diet. Later, however, his medical history came to light: he had developed cardiomyopathy in 2000 from a viral illness that led to a myocardial infarction two years later. The direct cause of death was a fall after slipping on ice while walking to work — again, at the age of 72. His hospital admission record notes that at that moment he weighed 88 kg. His weight of 116 kg at the time of death was probably due to the anasarca he developed during a two-week stay in the intensive care unit.

His death certificate states that the cause of death was "blunt impact injury of the head with epidural hematoma." The real cause of Dr. Atkins' death, according to the medical reports, was the head injury he suffered, not the diet program he created. Apparently, opponents from vegan groups spread falsehoods about his death, but the mainstream media accelerated this process of *fake news*, a term that did not yet exist at the time. In March 2007, Newsweek magazine published a correction stating: "An earlier version of this story contained an inaccurate

sequence of events surrounding the death of Dr. Robert Atkins. Newsweek regrets the error."

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