

A diet you don't want to try

Like my friend Dick Curtis in Seattle and two-thirds of the other men in the United States, I have been on Dr. Bob Atkins' diet, in which you eat carbohydrates such as bread and beer, but can gorge yourself on proteins, such as meat, carbohydrate-free beer, and, in my case, extremely expensive cheese from Trader Joe's, the aroma of which is capable of bringing down a jetliner.

Dr. Atkins' diet has come under severe criticism lately, and for a very good reason. It's stupid. The diet contains all the ingredients you need to give yourself a shacking case of gout.

Gout, in case you don't know (believe me I do now), is an excruciatingly painful disease in which uric acid crystallizes, for some reason, in your big toe. Under the influence of Dr. Atkins' Gout Diet, the big toe, generally a good-natured, inoffensive digit becomes swollen with rage at having its supply of beer cut off. As a result, though you shed pounds like magic, you cannot appreciate your new, streamlined body without the assistance of powerful painkillers and antidepressants.

After two weeks on Dr. Atkins' Gout Diet, I lost about a pound. The cheeses and meats erecting cholesterol forts inside my major veins and arteries offset this progress though. What's more, I am convinced I did not lose this pound because of the Gout Diet; I lost it because for two weeks I refrained from eating anything from the snack table at work.

The snack table at the San Diego County Office of Education happens to be directly behind my desk. Every day, educators who want to hurt me and force me to retire bring in snacks such as homemade fudge, birthday cakes, pretzels, bagels with cream cheese and, in one case, a 60-pound tube containing equal parts of lard and processed sugar. Educators, who will eat anything as long as it's free, stop by all day and nibble until the food is all gone.

I have never seen any sort of food left on the snack table that was not consumed entirely. You could leave a tub of mayonnaise there with a garden trowel in it, and after it was emptied out, a late-working educator would come by and look forlornly at the empty tub, like a dog looking at the place where you once dropped a T-bone.

Like dieters everywhere, I thought snacking might not be my own fault. Perhaps it's an occupational hazard of working at an education center.

To test this hypothesis, I did an experiment last week. I put a bunch of dog biscuits in a bowl and left them on the snack table. I didn't dress up the dog biscuits to look like Fig Newtons, or put icing on them. Any normal educator (assuming those words mean anything at all) could

have figured out what the dog biscuits were with just a little scrutiny. If the educators wolfed down the dog biscuits, I figured snacking was not just my problem, it's an occupational hazard.

My heartless boss, who took it upon himself to look at my computer screen while I was writing this, removed the dog biscuits from the snack table, thus interrupted this scientific experiment. He said it was a mean trick to play on hungry educators and also, possibly the people who sign our checks. So, being a "hard-to-direct" employee, I put the bowl back on the snack table with a sign attached to it, in capital letters: DOG BISCUITS. FREE! HAVE ONE!

Sure enough, an assistant superintendent not only ate one, but also came back for seconds. Several other co-workers, who once considered me odd, ate some too. As a matter of fact, the dog biscuits were so popular I couldn't resist trying one myself.

So now I know snacking is not my fault; it's an occupational hazard of working for a school system. But one thing troubles me. Are dog biscuits carbohydrates?