

New research shows that a diet higher in protein and lower in carbohydrates than currently recommended can help you lose more fat, preserve muscle, and improve your cholesterol levels.

For 10 weeks, 24 women ate 1,700 calories each day. One group followed a high-carbohydrate diet – 55% carbohydrate, 15% protein and 30% fat. The experimental group ate a modified diet containing 40% carbohydrate, 30% protein and 30% fat.

The average weight loss of all the women was virtually identical (about 16 pounds). However, there were startling differences for women who ate the higher protein diet. They lost 12.3 pounds of body fat and just 1.7 pounds of muscle mass. Those who stuck to the high-carbohydrate diet lost 10.4 pounds of body fat and, more significantly, 3 pounds of muscle mass.

“The protein diet was twice as effective at preserving muscle,” says Donald Layman, a professor of nutritional sciences at the University of Illinois. “Women eating the lower protein diet were less capable of burning calories at the end of the study as when they started it. We believe this is the effect of more protein, particularly the increased amount of leucine (an essential amino acid found in protein) in the diet.”

The study also found higher levels of thyroid hormones among women who ate the protein diet, suggesting a higher rate of metabolism. Protein-eaters also experienced a significant decline of overall triglycerides (fat in the blood) and a slight rise in HDL (the “good” cholesterol).

Unfortunately, it’s very difficult for most people to get enough protein in their diet. Most convenience-foods are either too low in protein (such as cereal or most sandwiches), or contain too much saturated fat. The easy way to get the right balance of carbohydrate and protein in your diet is to eat 1-2 meal-replacement bars (such as Promax Meal bars) each day. Each bar contains just the right balance of high-quality protein (21 grams) and carbohydrate (17.1 grams), with less than 3 grams of saturated fat.