



Body wise

Paula Goodyer

New approach for diet nuts

THERE'S nothing new about the success of high-protein diets for weight loss – unless the protein that helps strip away the kilos comes not from a hunk of beef, but from plant foods.

Eco-Atkins is the name of a new eating plan from the father of the Glycaemic Index, Professor David Jenkins from the University of Toronto, who wondered what would happen if you swapped the meat protein in an Atkins-style diet for protein from soy, nuts and gluten.

What happened, according to his new study, is that after 28 weeks a group of overweight men and women following a vegan diet had lost 10 per cent of their starting weight.

Skinnier waists weren't the only reward. Their insulin sensitivity had improved, lowering their risk of diabetes, and their cholesterol levels were healthier. This drop in both "bad" LDL cholesterol and kilos might give the Eco-Atkins diet an edge over its meaty counterparts. No one doubts that high (meat) protein diets can shift weight but some studies suggest they also increase LDL cholesterol – which raises questions about their effects on health in the long term, says Sue Radd, an accredited practising dietitian with the Nutrition and Wellbeing Clinic in Sydney.

The reason why high-protein diets can work well is partly because big helpings of protein keep you feeling full. But don't assume that this protein has to come from meat, she adds. Research shows that, in terms of staying in your stomach – which is what makes you feel full – protein from both animals and plants sticks around longer than carbohydrates.

"What the Eco-Atkins diet shows is that just as not all carbohydrates are equal, neither is all protein – and plant protein has the added benefit of lowering LDL cholesterol and improving insulin resistance more," Radd says.



of soy food, gluten (protein from wheat) and nuts. But if you don't fancy gluten (used in Asian cooking and available canned or chilled from Asian food stores) or lots of soy foods, Radd suggests other legumes such as chickpeas, lentils and beans, and more nuts and seeds. Nuts, incidentally, are gaining a healthy reputation for helping take weight off – studies suggest nut eaters tend to be leaner, she says.

The Eco-Atkins diet isn't the first research to suggest that a pledge to veg can make you lighter – results of a new US study have found that vegetarian Seventh Day Adventists have a Body Mass Index that's five points lower than that of the general population.

Along with healthy fat from avocado and nuts, other fats used in the Eco-Atkins diet came from mono-unsaturated olive or canola oil – getting the heart-healthy benefits of a plant-based diet also means weeding out hidden saturated fats. But, Radd says, there's still some ignorance about where these fats lurk.

"Clients say to me, 'I have a low-fat diet – I use no-oil salad dressing.' But they forget about the biscuits they eat or the saturated fat and trans fats in processed foods."

For more health and nutrition news,