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TILLMAN: A FOOTBALL STAR DIES IN AFGHANISTAN

LOW-CARB NATION

In a world beyond bread, low-carb foods have become big business. Do they taste good? Do they work? A guide for the smart eater

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Doritos
Carbs
Diet
Living the Low Carb Life
Great for
LOW-CARB
DIETS
NET CARBS PER SERVING
SWEETENED WITH
Splenda
Cholesterol 5mg
Sodium 105mg
Total Carbohydrate 0g
Dietary Fiber 0g
Sugars 0g
Protein 0g
MAKE IT A LOW CARB COMBO
Diet Coke
NEW! Truth About Carb
LowCarb
Energy
CARBOHYDRATES
1g
PER SERVING
Carb Options
6g NET CARBS*
COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE
Low-Carb Meals
1,001
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RECIPES
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NEW
KRAFT
Carb Well
Classic Caesar
A COMPLETE
LOW
CARB
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Baja Bo
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RUBY TUESDAY'S
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HEINZ
NEW!
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REDUCED SUGAR TOMATO KETCHUP
Carbo Save
Only 1g of Carbs
Cracker
4 Net Carb
12 FL OZ (355mL)
NO CARBS
For Use as Part of a Low Carb Diet!
See nutrition information for calorie content.
CARB FIT
Almond
0g CARBS PER SERVING
Splenda
NET CARBS
7g
NET CARBS
Sodium 10
otal Carb
DANNON
Light 'n Fit
CARB CONTROL
Net Carbs
Thin!
Carb
NEW!
LOW
CARB

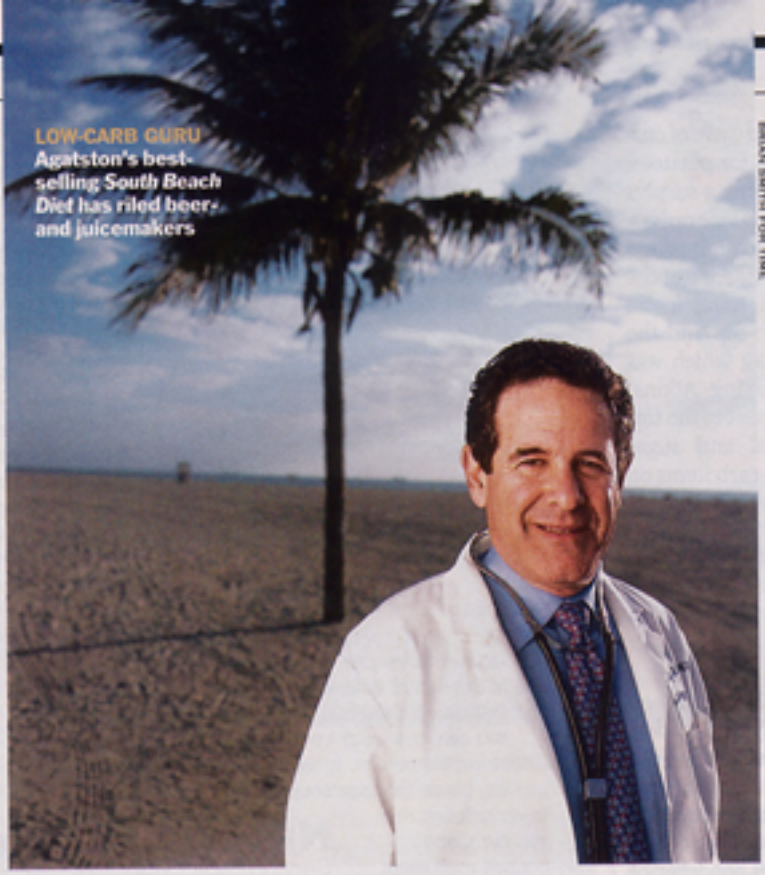
THE LOW-CARB FRENZY

THE FORCE THAT IS RESHAPING THE FOOD INDUSTRY—AND OUR BODIES

By DANIEL KADLEC

LET GO FROM HIS JOB AS A HOTEL MANAGER LAST SUMMER, BRAD SALTZMAN had begun to panic by fall. Sure, his bank account was evaporating. But equally upsetting, he says, was that he was seeking too much comfort in the kitchen and was busting out of his belt. Physically and fiscally, Saltzman, 36, was a mess. Then he hit upon a cure-all: low carbs. Saltzman went on the Atkins diet at about the same time he helped launch Pure Foods, a specialty retailer based in Beverly Hills, Calif., that sells only products with comparatively few carbohydrates. Today Saltzman is 25 lbs. lighter, and his wallet is weighty. He has 24 employees, up from just four when he started, and will have 40 full-timers by June. "It was a eureka moment for me," Saltzman says of his carb-counting catharsis in October. "I needed to lose weight, and I needed a job in the next 30 days or—all kidding aside—I'd have had to move in with my grandmother." Instead, he's college-trim and planning a chain of stores and low-carb cafés and vending machines that he believes will ring up $100 million in sales annually within five years.

Critics of the carb counters' revolution may scoff at Saltz-



LOW-CARB GURU Agatston's best-selling *South Beach Diet* has riled beer- and juicemakers

BRIAN SMITH FOR TIME

"If this is a fad," he adds, "I hope it's as long-lived as low fat, which took 22 years to come and go."

DIET INC. DOWNER

THE DIET INDUSTRY IS IN distress. Massive numbers of dieters have migrated to low-carb strategies in the past couple of years, exiting programs that emphasize portion control. The heavyweights of the diet industry, Weight Watchers and Jenny Craig, are feeling the pinch. "Any time there is anything new in the market, it is going to affect clients who want to lose weight quickly," says Cozette Phifer, spokeswoman at Jenny Craig. She concedes that new business is depressed but asserts that the dip won't last long. Both companies say they have refrained from introducing low-carb items because their nutritionists oppose the idea and think it's a fad that will fade. "We believe carbohydrates are an important part of a balanced diet," says Jim Evans, CEO of Jenny Craig.

At Weight Watchers, which is publicly traded, the stock has been sputtering in a strong market since October 2002, and net income has been flat for two years. The firm gets most of its revenue from memberships, which have been flagging, says analyst Kathleen Heaney at the Maxim Group, a New York City brokerage firm. That's temporary, according to Eliot Glazer, vice president of North American marketing for Weight Watchers. "A lot of what is behind low carbs is pseudo science," he says. He reports seeing a flood of disheartened low-carb dieters come to Weight Watchers as "they find they really need help to lose weight."

THE BAD-NEWS BEERS

BEER IS WIDELY SEEN AS BAD NEWS FOR ANYone counting carbs, which helps explain why beer consumption was down 1.6% last year and why Anheuser is determined to wrest a correction out of Agatston. Interestingly, Anheuser stumbled on the maltose issue when one of its St. Louis–based brewmasters, John Serbia, read Agatston's book before starting the South Beach diet this winter. Serbia ignored the part about abstaining from beer and lost 15 lbs., says Anheuser spokeswoman Katz.

Still, while beer sales have gone flat, volume increased 3% last year for spirits, which generally contain no carbs. Alcohol of any sort is frowned upon in almost every diet because it contains calories and can act as an appetite stimulant. In some cases the body may turn to the more readily available alcohol instead of stored fat to burn as an energy source.

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The number of low-carb books that will be in print by year-end, up from 15 in 1999

Despite all that, the spirits industry has made hay with its low-carb status. Distillers, including Bacardi and Diageo, have launched ad campaigns to trumpet their spirits' carblessness. Diageo, which makes Smirnoff, the world's top-selling premium vodka, created the website LowCarbParties.com to tell drinkers how to decarb their cocktails. "The spirit is not the problem," says food and wine expert Ted Allen from *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, who helped launch the site. "It's the mixer." Liquor and grocery stores are beginning to carry products like Baja Bob's low-carb margarita mix, which has been sold online and in specialty stores for four years and is now getting space at Meijer and other supermarkets in the Midwest and Northwest. Sales were up 380% last year.

This spirited success spawned the growth of new low-carb beers, which started with phenomenally successful Ultra and now include Coors Aspen Edge and Rolling Rock's Rock Green Light. As a class, these brews are saving the day because "everything else went into the doldrums," says Harry Schuhmacher, editor of the newsletter *Beer Business Daily*. Anheuser attributes its record U.S. beer sales last year (103 million bbl., up 800,000) in large part to Ultra, which was launched in late 2002 and whose sales have more than quadrupled initial projections. "It became the fastest-growing beer brand since Miller Lite was introduced in 1975," says Schuhmacher. The company quietly reformulated its Natural Lite to add to the low-carb train. Promoting low-carb beer got a little trickier this month when the Feds warned against ads portraying these drinks as even remotely healthy.

CAN ANYTHING STOP THE LOW-CARB CULture? Not likely anytime soon. It will be years before we have conclusive long-term research on health risks. The arrival of big food companies in this fray means big money is at play and low-carb living will be marketed with a vengeance. The undisputed benefit of low-carb products to diabetics means a durable customer base. And extreme weight-loss methods like having your stomach stapled—though it worked for lovable TV weatherman Al Roker—have proved ineffective for up to 20% of those who tried them. So the fast results and pure simplicity of cutting carbs promise lasting appeal.

That is, until we get sick of it. In the end, the biggest risk to the culture may be the inevitable false or misleading low-carb claims and influx of products that ladle on heapings of calories in exchange for carbs. If enough people are seduced by these foods and fail to lose weight, low carbs will go the way of low fat: a strategy that works when you stick to the rules but fails when marketers rush in with promises no one can keep. *—With reporting by Julie Rawe, Alice Park and Daren Fonda/New York; Wendy Cole/Chicago; Jeanne DeQuine/Miami; Rita Healy/Denver; Marc Hequet/St. Paul; Hilary Hylton/Austin; Laura A. Locke/San Francisco; and Sean Scully/Los Angeles*