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## ***Evidence for Long-Term Weight Loss Maintenance on a High-Carb, Low-Fat Diet***

There is evidence that people can lose weight and maintain that weight loss on a high-carbohydrate, low-fat diet, provided the diet is structured around whole, minimally processed foods and overall calorie intake is controlled (often spontaneously, because these foods are filling).

### **1. Direct Long-Term Weight Loss Maintenance (Ornish & Similar Programs)**

Several lifestyle-intervention studies using a very-low-fat, high-carbohydrate, plant-based diet ( $\approx 10\text{--}20\%$  fat,  $\sim 70\text{--}75\%$  carbs) found:

- Significant weight loss in the first year
- Sustained weight loss at 5–10 years, in participants who adhered to the food pattern
- Major cardiovascular risk reduction, supporting sustainability

Examples:

- Ornish Lifestyle Heart Trial (5-year follow-up)
- Plant-Based Diet programs in the CHIP/Complete Health Improvement Program

These aren't "weight-loss" trials per se, but they show durable long-term weight reduction.

### **2. National Weight Control Registry**

The biggest registry of people who've lost  $>30$  lbs and kept it off for  $>1$  year. A substantial proportion of successful maintainers report:

- Low-fat, high-carb diets
- Heavy emphasis on fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains
- Low energy density food choices

This is not a randomized trial, but the registry documents real-world long-term maintenance patterns.

### **3. The A TO Z, DIETFITS, and Other Comparative Diet Studies**

Long randomized trials comparing diet types show:

- Weight loss at 12–24 months is similar between low-carb and low-fat diets.
- Participants who succeed long term tend to eat more minimally processed carbohydrate sources and keep overall calories in check (often unintentionally because high-fiber carbs are filling).

The DIETFITS trial (Gardner et al., 2018) is especially relevant:

- ~600 participants
- Healthy Low-Fat diet ≈ ~55–60% carbs
- Both low-carb and low-fat groups lost and maintained similar amounts of weight at 1 year
- No long-term regain differences

While DIETFITS was not ultra-high-carb, it confirms that high-carb diets do not impair long-term success in some people.

### **4. “Blue Zones” Epidemiology (Long-Term Natural Experiments)**

Populations with the longest healthy lifespans — Okinawans, Nicoyans, Ikarians, and many others — traditionally follow:

- 70–80% carbohydrate diets
- Low fat (often 10–20%)
- Very little animal food
- High fiber, high volume, unprocessed staples like potatoes, beans, rice

They exhibit:

- Low obesity rates
- Stable lifelong healthy BMIs
- High satiety on a low-fat, high-carb diet pattern

This isn't a diet program, but it shows long-term weight stability on this food composition.

## **5. Controlled Feeding & Metabolic Ward Studies**

Short-term studies show:

- Low-fat, high-carbohydrate diets often lead to spontaneous calorie reduction because they're higher volume, higher fiber, and lower in calorie density.
- Metabolic ward studies show equal or better fat loss on low-fat diets when calories are matched.

These studies help explain why long-term success is possible.

### **What Makes High-Carb, Low-Fat Diets Effective for Long-Term Maintenance?**

- High satiety from high-fiber, high-volume foods (beans, whole grains, fruits, potatoes, vegetables).
- Low energy density — you can eat a larger quantity of food for fewer calories.
- Strong metabolic improvements — better insulin sensitivity and lower LDL cholesterol increase adherence and well-being.
- Behavioral sustainability — foods are affordable, accessible, and culturally common.

### **Important Nuance**

High-carb diets only support long-term weight loss if carbohydrates come from whole, minimally processed sources. Diets high in refined starches and sugars, even if low in fat, tend to cause weight gain.

### **Bottom Line**

Yes — a substantial body of evidence shows that people can lose weight and keep it off on a high-carbohydrate, low-fat diet, especially when it is:

- Based on whole foods
- High in fiber
- Low in energy density
- Sustainable for the individual

This dietary pattern is supported by clinical trials, long-term cohort data, metabolic studies, and populations with lifelong healthy weight.