

Back to 'Reality': Variety and fiber key to new diet

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MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

July 11, 2006

Waffles for breakfast. Ham and avocado wrap for lunch. Stir-fried rice for dinner. Blueberry-vanilla custard for dessert.

Sounds like a day of bliss for non-calorie counters.

Actually, it's a typical day's menu from "The Reality Diet" (Avery, \$24.95), a new book by Dr. Steven Schnur, CEO of South Florida Cardiology Associates in Miami Beach. Its 200-plus recipes cover an eight-week period -- though you can stick with the plan the rest of your life. And why not? There's even pizza on this thing, albeit with Canadian bacon, no pepperoni.

"I've designed it so you're eating regular food you enjoy -- from hot dogs and hamburgers to lobster thermidor," says Schnur. "This is a diet for real people living in the real world."

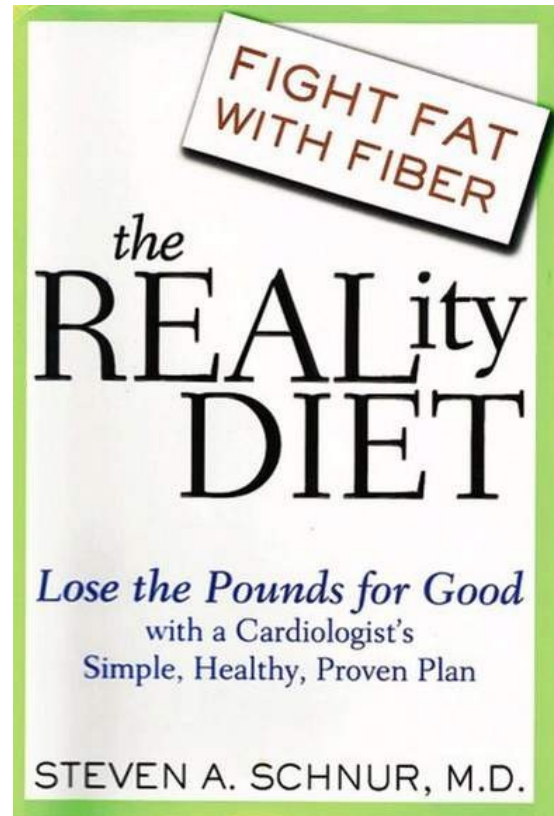
As you might have noticed, low-carbing-it isn't a requirement this time around. As a doctor, Schnur says, he can't condone the nutritional restrictions of many trendster diets.

"Human beings are designed to eat from all food groups," he says. "In the last few years, patients on the low-carb plans come in saying they were dizzy, light-headed or too tired to exercise ... that's because carbohydrates give you energy!"

Shirley De Leon, Schnur's in-house nutritionist and a consultant on the book, agrees.

"It's not carbs that are making people overweight -- it's overeating, period," she says. "We're eating too much and moving too little, and the equation doesn't balance."

Schnur's hardly magic-bullet prescription: Fiber, the structural part of plants that's not broken down by digestive enzymes. And not just a spoonful of Metamucil in your morning OJ. He's talking a daily diet filled with fiber-rich foods like oats, beans, fruits, wheat bran, whole-grain cereals and such root vegetables as turnips, rutabagas, parsnips and sweet potatoes. Even the big supposed no-no, spuds.



The federal government agrees, recommending that adults consume a minimum of 25 fiber grams a day. Right now, Schnur says, the average Joe/Josephine takes in half to two-thirds of that.

"It amazes me when people say this is a high-fiber diet," he says. "I'm not stuffing you with 50 grams, I'm just bringing you to where you should be."

What's so great about fiber? We all know it helps with -- ahem -- digestion, but did you know it also lowers cholesterol by allowing it to be eliminated naturally?

But its most alluring feature, for dieters, at least, is that it keeps hunger pangs at bay. Leaf through the back of Schnur's book; the scrumptious-sounding recipes -- spinach pesto fettuccine, banana flan, salmon croquettes -- were conceived by San Franciscan Andrew Hunter, who has helped develop crowd-pleasing menus for TGI Friday's, Outback Steakhouse and Ruby Tuesday.

Just know this is no quick fix. If you're a size 12 who wants to fit into a size 6 bridesmaid dress by Labor Day, it isn't for you.

"Unlike all those other diets out there, mine doesn't target belly fat, make you eat every three hours or have phases or stages," Schnur says. "Setting your watch to eat? Thinking you'll keep pounds off if you lose them quickly? Detoxifying over a weekend? Ridiculous. You have to eat sensibly, and make it a lifestyle."

"Have a nice breakfast, a nice lunch, maybe a snack during the day, a good dinner, and that's it. Learn to live life not thinking about food -- and make that your reality."