

# Very Low Calorie Diets

## Consequences of a Very Low Calorie Diet:

- **Fatigue**
- **Constipation**
- **Nausea**
- **Diarrhea**
- **Gallstones**
- **Weight re-gain**
- **Fatal heart rhythm disturbances**
- **Weight loss not resulting in body fat loss**

## Very Low Calorie Diet (VLCD)

The definition of a VLCD varies in the scientific literature. But most researchers agree that any diet providing less than 800-1000 calories per day is a VLCD. These diets (when properly medical supervised) aim to supply very little energy, while trying to supply essential nutrients. They are attractive because patients often see rapid results. The average weight loss is between 3-5 pounds per week.

VLCD almost always includes meal replacement drinks that are specially formulated to provide the patient with essential nutrients. The majority of VLCD patients also require a potassium supplement. Close medical monitoring is required because of the drastic caloric restriction and the necessity of potassium supplements.

Research funded by meal replacement companies show that 85% of patients do achieve their goal weight (losing between 50-250 pounds). Those studies show that 3 years later half of those patients had maintained most of their weight loss.



The history of the VLCD goes back to 1929 when Evans and Strang published their successful results. In the 70s the VLCD attracted commercial interest. But unfortunately the commercial use of hydrolyzed collagen as the only protein source and no inclusion of adequate amounts of vitamins, minerals, and electrolytes proved to be fatal as reported by the U.S. government.

Today's prescribed meal replacements (not those found at a retail store) do supply all the necessary nutrition and can be used successfully to obtain weight loss. And when used with an exercise and education program, they can result in long term success. But long term success is DEPENDENT on behavioral modification and a commitment to a healthy lifestyle that includes a modest well balanced diet and daily exercise.

Of all the diet plans researched in the past century. Behavior modification including implementing portion control, balanced nutrition and committing to daily exercise has the best long term success. A commitment to lifestyle change begins with empowerment through education.

## Concerns with Very Low Calorie Diets

VLCDs cause a rapid shift in water balance which can lead to dangerous alterations in the balance of electrolytes that are important to heart function. VLCDs are often nutritionally insufficient. Due to the rapid weight loss there is a high incidence of gallstone formation. Also, these diets teach nothing about how to modify dietary habits in the long term and often result in a rapid weight gain when the patient goes off the diet.

Further research has shown that the body doesn't lose any more weight on a 500 calorie diet than a 800 calorie diet. The body goes into "starvation mode", downregulating its metabolic rate and calorie burn, as a tactic designed to survive time of starvation.