Physical and emotional health effects and social consequences after participation in a low-fat, high-carbohydrate dietary trial for more than 5 years.

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Little is known about the potential adverse effects of interventions to reduce dietary fat. We examined the physical and emotional health effects, and social consequences experienced by women at high risk for breast cancer who had participated in a low-fat diet intervention, randomized, controlled trial for at least 5 years.

Participants in the Canadian Diet and Breast Cancer Prevention Trial from British Columbia were mailed a survey questionnaire that included the validated Medical Outcomes Study 36-item Short Form Health Survey (SF-36) and Women’s Health Questionnaire (WHQ), and a series of questions on health-related and social constructs. Responses were compared between the diet intervention and control groups by menopausal status.

Completed questionnaires were returned by 359 women in the diet intervention group and 382 in the control group. No significant differences were found between these groups for SF-36 and WHQ health outcomes, hair/nail changes, physical activity levels, family/friend support levels, and doctor visits. Significantly more women in the intervention group reported taking products for arthritis (other than pain medication), greater difficulty in maintaining eating habits in social situations and at work, greater stress, and guilt related to personal eating habits. These findings persisted for both premenopausal and postmenopausal women.

Changes resulting from a low-fat diet intervention can be incorporated into women’s daily lives with limited long-term negative effects.

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