

Carb Wars

The Atkins Diet and others have students, restaurants looking for low-carb alternatives

By Amber Gray
THE BATTALION

Mary Beth George remembers the fad liquid and fasting diets of the 1980s.

"I can remember even Oprah was losing a lot of weight from the diets," said George, a human nutrition lecturer and registered dietitian. "But pretty soon you saw her, like many other people, gain the weight right back."

Today, high-protein, low-carbohydrate fad diets, such as Atkins and South Beach, are sweeping the nation as people turn to the quick weight-loss programs.

"People are now buying into these diets because they are telling individuals what they want to hear," George said. "When people are told they can eat fatty food and lose weight, of course it's going to sound like a good idea."

The Atkins Diet has more than 20 million followers worldwide, claiming individuals will lose weight quickly and effectively by following its guidelines.

"You do lose weight quickly," George said. "But people usually only use these diets for short-term lengths and then regain their weight back, sometimes gaining even more than before."

Rapid weight loss, like that promised with the high-protein, low-carb diets, can cause many risk factors such as gallstones, gout, excess skin and malnutrition.

"Since there have been no long-term or controlled studies on these diets, professionals are very concerned," George said. "They suspect long-term effects from using these diets can be linked to heart disease, cancer and a depletion of calcium in bones."

The U.S. National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute guidelines warn individuals to avoid fad diets and weight loss programs that promote fast weight loss which is more than two pounds a week.

"Diets are similar to any other fad, just like jelly shoes and kangaroo shoes," said Amy Walker, a healthcare lecturer. "They are popular for a brief time until something else comes along, then individuals will look back and say, 'I can't believe I did that.'"

Even major restaurant chains such as Subway and TGI Fridays are joining the crowd by offering menus focused around low-carb meals.

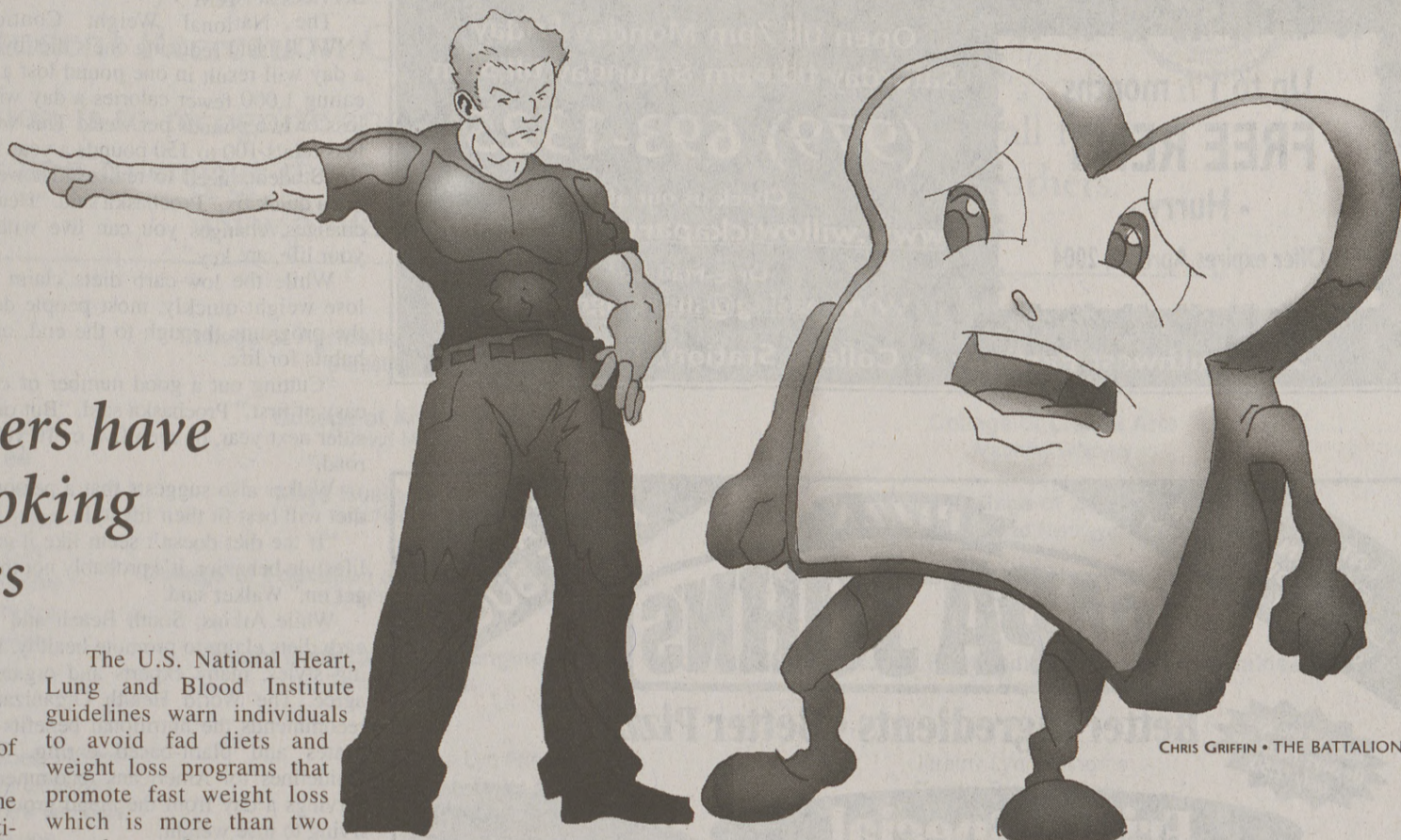
"These diets are the new craze," Walker said. "So many people are trying it, and the restaurants want to make money by creating an outlet for customers pursuing this weight loss program."

Jenny Klein, a senior marketing major, said she jumped on the Atkins bandwagon after her sister raved about it.

"I hadn't planned on dieting before my sister told me about the Atkins," Klein said. "But with summer coming up I thought, 'why not shed a few pounds?'"

Another recent weight-loss trend is to lose weight easily with over-the-counter pills. While in theory, the main use for weight-loss drugs is the treatment of obese individuals, the drugs are not solely being used by those with serious health risks.

"Everyone is looking for the magic bullet," George said. "However, let me tell you, it doesn't exist."



CHRIS GRIFFIN • THE BATTALION

Clinical weight loss studies have shown that no sustained weight loss and long-term weight control can be achieved through using weight-loss pills alone, and upon discontinuing use, the weight is virtually always gained back. According to a report in the Journal of Obesity Research, people who used diet supplements containing ephedra only lost an extra 7.5 pounds over a six month time frame.

"Trust me," said George, "if the pills were effective I guarantee they would be coming from the major drug corporations and the insurance companies would be involved. Everyone would want a slice of the pie."

There is only one healthy way to lose the weight, Walker said. "I promote keeping a balanced diet and staying active," she said. "You either need to lower your calorie intake or burn more calories through increased activity."

Leading experts in obesity today recommend individuals try to lose 5 to 10 percent of their body weight, while setting a realistic goal.

"Healthy weight loss is generally one to two pounds per week,"

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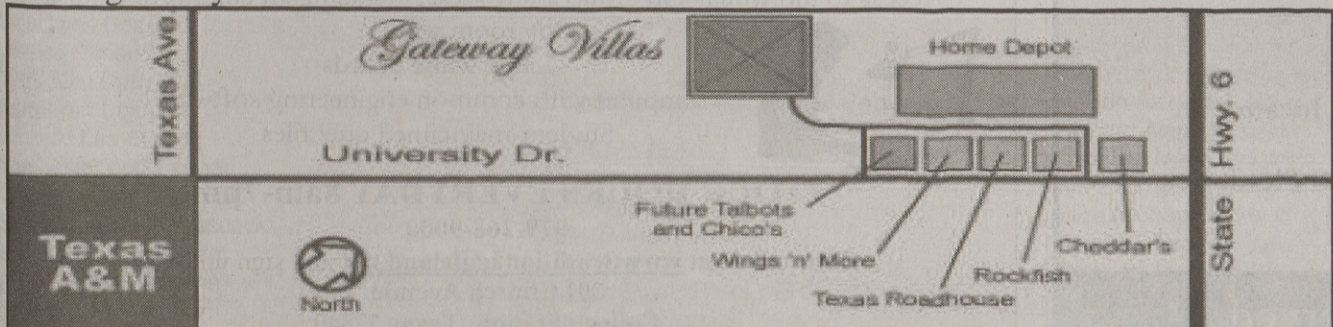
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