



Low-Carb Cruising

by Chris Dikmen

Just because you are on the Atkins or South Beach Diet does not mean you have to avoid taking the vacation of a lifetime. In fact, I am convinced that a cruise is the best vacation for low-carb dieters.

Unfortunately, Americans equate cruising with gorging. Most people think that gaining 7 to 10 pounds during a cruise is acceptable. For years the cruise industry has attracted passengers to its ships with promises of 7 meals per day or more. Certainly, the temptation to overeat and overindulge is amplified on a cruise. Not only is food available 24 hours a day, but it is included in the price of the cruise. Some people feel cheated if they do not eat themselves into a coma at every opportunity; otherwise, they paid for something they did not get.

Therefore, to enjoy your cruise without sabotaging your weight management/loss program requires a completely different frame of mind. Fortunately, you have probably already undergone a significant change in thinking by committing yourself to a low-carb lifestyle. So when preparing for a low-carb cruise, there are really two things that you have to keep in mind:

1. Define a plan for limiting the carbs during your cruise.
2. Accept that cruising without carbs can be enjoyable. You don't have to have the pies, cakes and breads to have a great time on a cruise. Look at it this way, it is better to be on a low-carb lifestyle and on a cruise than on a low-carb lifestyle and be at home!

How to limit carbs during your cruise

It is actually very easy to limit carbs while on a cruise. Since starting the Atkins Diet in July of 2002, I have been on more than 15 cruises. During that time, I have been able to successfully lose 35 pounds and keep the weight off. The great thing about a cruise is you have so many choices of proteins and vegetables that it is actually

easier and more enjoyable to adhere to a low-carb regimen on a ship than on land.

Plan ahead - Pack low-carb snacks

Low-Carb Tip!

Take a couple of the low-carb candies to dinner each evening to eat as your dessert.

There are so many great low-carb snacks available on the market now, especially the candies and breakfast bars. I always pack a half dozen Advantage (Atkins) food bars for every cruise. I sometimes will eat these for breakfast instead of bacon and eggs. The new low-carb Russell Stover candies are delicious and very easy to pack. Keep the candy in your in-room refrigerator to prevent it from melting.

Eat Breakfast in the dining room

Rather than going to the breakfast buffet on the Lido Deck, try going to the main restaurant for breakfast. Here you can order from a set menu and just about every cruise ship will offer you a fresh, delicious omelet. Go ahead and pack it with ham, onion and cheese if you want, it is all legal! A side order of bacon or ham is also a delicious addition. Remember, it is all paid for, so enjoy. If you love Eggs Benedict, GO FOR IT. Just don't eat the English Muffin. The eggs, Hollandaise sauce and Canadian bacon are all legal. On Radisson Seven Seas Cruises, Silversea Cruises and SeaDream Yacht Club, you can even order a breakfast steak or baby lamb chops to accompany your omelet.

Save The Buffet For Lunch

Most ships offer a buffet lunch on the Lido Deck (near the pool). There are all kinds of low-carb items you can enjoy on the lunch buffet. There are lots of salad options, just avoid the pasta salads and fruit salads which tend to be full of carbs. There is almost always a carving station with roast beef, lamb, turkey or pork. There will also be a selection of green vegetables.

Things to look for:

- * Carving Station
- * Green Salads
- * Green Vegetables (spinach, green beans, etc.)
- * Whole Grain Rolls or Bread
- * Bouillon or Broth

Things to Avoid:

- * Croutons
- * Sweet dressings like French, 1000 Island, etc.
- * Pasta Salads and Pasta in general
- * Potatoes
- * Desserts
- * Breads other than Whole Grain
- * Creamy soups
- * Pizza & Pasta

Be sensible

Low-Carb Tip!

If a food item is white or yellow, it is probably full of carbohydrates. White flour, bread, corn, potatoes, sugar, yellow squash. As a rule of thumb, substitute something green for something white or yellow!

One misconception about a low-carb diet is that you can eat all the steak, butter, cheese and eggs you want and still lose weight. While that is true in theory, it is not a healthy low-carb lifestyle. If you want to load up on large quantities to satisfy your hunger, do it with green vegetables and salads, not fatty beef and eggs. It is better to have a 8oz Rib Eye with lots of salad and green beans than a 16oz. Rib Eye and no vegetables. A great cruise lunch might be a huge chef's salad with lots of lettuce, cheese, eggs, ham and turkey. Top it off with a balsamic vinegar and oil dressing, (or bring your own low-carb dressing) and you have a filling and satisfying lunch!

Dont be afraid to ask for something special

You might be surprised to learn that cruise lines are generally very willing to fulfill special requests in the dining room. This is something I take full advantage of, especially in the dining room each evening. Every cruise line dining room has a Maitre D or Dining Room Captain and they are a low-carb dieters best friend. Take a few minutes to meet with the Maitre D when you board the ship and mention that you do not eat starchy vegetables and would like to have green vegetables each evening. In some cases, they may not be able to fill your request the first evening, but should be able to do so every night thereafter.

During an Alaska cruise on Celebrity Summit, our waiter brought me creamed spinach every evening without being asked a second time. Impressive for a ship with

2,500 passengers! On some of the smaller ships, like Silversea Silver Wind and SeaDream Yacht Club, I was able to get even more specific about how I like the spinach prepared with garlic and mushrooms!

On the larger ships with assigned seating, your waiter is your ally. He knows that his gratuity is based on how satisfied you are when you leave the table each evening. If you tell him what you want, he or she should work extra hard to make sure your wishes are met. If he or she does not, ask the head waiter to move you to another table. Cruise lines, by and large, want you to be a satisfied customer, but they are not good at reading your mind. Don't be afraid to ask for something!

- * Request green vegetables each evening from your waiter or Maitre D
- * Order a Caesar salad each evening
- * At the pool grill, ask for two hamburger patties with no bun (and skip the fries!)
- * At the bar, ask for Michelob Ultra (low-carb beer) or Miller Lite

Watch what you drink

I always drink more alcoholic beverages on a cruise than I do normally. I think this is partially because I do not have to drive home from the bar! However, some drinks can be loaded with carbs. Avoid all frozen drinks such as Margaritas, Pina Colada, Daquiri, etc. Even a Mojito has a lot of sugar in it. White wine is better than red and even a glass of champagne won't completely blow your regimen. Hard liquor has no carbs, but I don't know of any diet that recommends excessive amounts of hard liquor.

Drinks to avoid:

- * Frozen drinks
- * Mojito
- * Tonic drinks (Gin & Tonic, Vodka Tonic, etc.)
- * All soft drinks with sugar
- * Lemonade
- * Bailey's, Sambuca, Kahlua, or any 'dessert' drinks (they are pure sugar)

Drinks to enjoy:

- * White wine
- * Champagne (in moderation)
- * Hard liquor (scotch, vodka, gin, etc.)
- * Diet soft drinks
- * Diet or sugar-free tonic

- * Club soda
- * Water
- * Ice tea

If you enjoy mixed drinks with tonic (i.e. Gin & Tonic or Vodka Tonic) ask the bartender if they offer diet or sugar-free tonic. Regular tonic is full of sugar and has a very high carb count. You may even consider bringing a 6-pack of diet tonic onboard with you. You should not have any problems getting this through security. If they say anything, tell them that it is a dietary requirement.

Enjoy Low-Carb Snacks

Another thing I enjoy is having a before-dinner snack around 4:30 each afternoon. This is especially important if I am dining later than 7:00pm. Just about every cruise line offers a cheese and cracker plate from room service. The cheese makes an excellent low-carb snack to tide you over until dinner. Sometimes we will take our cheese plate and a glass of wine out on our balcony to enjoy each afternoon.

On the luxury lines, you can get your cheese plate delivered just about anywhere on the ship. Get to know your bartender at your favorite lounge and let him know that you want a cheese plate every afternoon when you come in for your favorite beverage. Silversea, SeaDream and Radisson Seven Seas are all great with these types of requests.

Beware of no sugar added desserts

Don't be suckered in by the 'no sugar added' or "zero-zero" claims on desserts. Don't assume that these desserts are low in carbs. Just because the galley does not add sugar does not mean that there is no sugar in the dessert. If you are really disciplined, you could order a zero-zero ice cream and eat about two or three bites and push the rest away, but why play with temptation? A good dessert alternative is a decaf Cappuccino (if you like coffee). A better choice is to bring your own low-carb candy to dinner with you each night to enjoy with coffee.

Use the fitness center

One of the best features of virtually every ship sailing today is the fitness center. Most ships offer lots of cardiovascular equipment, fitness classes, weight machines and free weights. By exercising just 30 to 45 minutes every day during your cruise, you can stave off a lot of your hunger pangs and feel better about yourself to boot. Regular exercise is a vital part of a healthy low-carb lifestyle (or any lifestyle for that matter).

Treat Yourself One Night

If you are tempted to blow it, pick one night late in the cruise itinerary and designate it as your "night to celebrate". Perhaps the last formal night would be a good choice, when the Chef will most likely prepare his most exotic dishes. If you are going to blow it, you might as well enjoy a chocolate souffl or cherries jubilee, right? Remember, once you go over your grams per day carb limit, the additional carbs are really insignificant.

The logic behind selecting a night near the end of the cruise (perhaps the last formal night) is that there is not much time left in case you become tempted to blow your diet for the rest of the cruise!

You can cruise and lose

You might be surprised that you can enjoy a substantial amount of food on your cruise and actually lose weight! Imagine how good you will feel when you get home from your vacation and you are not carrying an extra 7 to 10 pounds.

Disclaimer

Chris Dikmen is not a medical professional and does not intend any information in this article to substitute for the advice of your doctor. Anyone altering their diet and exercise should consult with their physician before doing so.