

No carbs after 5pm?

Will this dietary rule keep the weight off? EMMA CHITTY investigates.

With so many rules and regulations surrounding carbohydrate intake, perhaps the most perplexing of all is the notion of not eating carbohydrates after five in the afternoon.

Bikini model bombshell Jennifer Hawkins admits to cutting carbs and avoiding them altogether before a big shoot, while other celebrities have revealed their secrets to keeping extra kilos at bay is to refuse carbohydrates in the evening. But the reality is carbohydrates are in so many foods that it is virtually impossible to live carb-free.

So where did this myth come from? And how can we use it to our advantage, without depriving ourselves of a wholesome, satisfying meal at dinner time?

"I do think the restriction of carbohydrates is a little bit dangerous, in terms of people getting fixated on only being able to eat certain things," Vital Nutrition nutritionist Angela Ferguson says.

"All elements of whole foods are needed in people's diets and that includes

carbohydrates, fats and proteins."

It's important to make a distinction between the kinds of carbohydrates dietitians recommend and those they don't.

"When we, as dietitians, encourage carbohydrates, we're not encouraging a full plate of pasta," says Margaret Hays, accredited practising dietitian and spokeswoman for the Dietitians Association of Australia.

"We're suggesting half a plate of vegetables or salad, a quarter of a plate of protein and a small to moderate portion of low-GI carbohydrates like basmati rice or sweet potato."

Naturopath Melissa Hohaia, at Perth Natural Medical Clinic, says her recommendation for a healthy dinner is not unlike what she'd recommend for breakfast or lunch.

"It's always about including foods that have a higher fibre content, as opposed to just the refined carbohydrate," she says.

Ms Hays says satisfaction and lifestyle concerns are big

issues when considering an approach of no carbs at night.

"People who don't put carbohydrates on their plate at dinner are often the ones in the biscuit tin later in the evening," she says. "And what happens if you don't have dinner until seven o'clock, or you've done a massive workout and need to replenish your glycogen stores?"

Ms Hohaia says cutting carbohydrates later in the day won't make up for other poor eating.

"You can't go and eat all your refined carbohydrates for breakfast and lunch and think just by cutting them out at dinner, you're going to get miraculous results."

TIP

The experts recommend eating carbohydrates that are low GI and controlling portion size, rather than cutting them out at any time of day.

"Try a small portion of low-GI carbohydrates at dinner – for example fish, a small potato and vegetables or some lean meat, sweet potato mash and salad," Ms Hays says. "It's really just a formula – and carbohydrates do need to be part of that formula."