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IT SEEMS the fat ladies have sung – our addiction to the Atkins diet is over. The company that flogs Atkins diet products here has suffered a severe drop in sales and is preparing to pull the plug on the UK operation. So farewell then, Atkins Nutritionals UK. What a difference a year makes in the frenzied world of food fads. Last summer at least five million Brits – myself included – were nosebag deep in bacon and eggs, embracing the Atkins diet like a new religion. We learned to call carbohydrates “carbs” (LA accent optional) and began shunning bread, pasta and potatoes as if they had fallen from a pigeon’s posterior.

Celebrities such as Davina McCall, Jennifer Aniston and Robbie Williams were reported to be among the new devotees of the wonder-diet – one that encouraged fry-ups and positively disapproved of brown rice.

I joined the stampede to the bookshop for the Dr Atkins Diet Revolution. The book was long but the principle was short. Stop eating carbohydrates, stick to fat and protein and a few greens and voila – thin in a fortnight. It was all a matter of retraining your metabolism to burn fat rather than storing it in that silhouette-ruining fashion.

However, American author Dr Robert Atkins said not to gorge on meat and cheese. Be sensible, he said. He cautioned against overdoing it on the fry-ups and the portions. But the bottom line was, you could so you did. I couldn’t pass the fridge without wolfing a fistful of prawns, a stack of salami or a couple of BabyBels. “This can’t,” my husband and sane friends were wont to comment, “be right.”

It ran counter to every piece of established medical advice. Nutritionists watched aghast as sensible eating rules of low fat, fruit and veg-heavy menus were joyfully trampled by the Atkins stampede. At one point, more than a fifth of British women were believed to be following some kind of low-carb, high-protein regime. Men were loving it, too – burgers are so much more macho than cottage cheese. Bread and potato businesses were feeling the pinch and meat and cheese chiefs were in clover.

Nobody could talk of anything else and politics, religion and gossip gave way to one consuming topic of conversation – the Atkins. What you’d eaten. How much you had lost. Who was on it. Pass the blue-cheese dressing and sing hallelujah.

OF COURSE – of course – it was too good to be true. Low-carb life was a joy for about 10 days. Then it started to become seriously boring. After endless bacon and eggs, coffee with cream and burgers sans buns, we were looking at lettuce with longing. We were fondling grapes and sighing. We wanted to sink our teeth into a wicked pile of penne.

Worse were the dire warnings from some experts that started to cut through the euphoria suggesting unpleasant side-effects of such a diet – constipation, bad breath, furry arteries and kidney stones, anyone? So the

Why we've all had it up to here with Atkins

Atkins fever abated, we stopped treating spuds, spaghetti and sarnies as poison and I bet I’m not the only one who quickly regained the weight. Now it’s the mourning after the diet before.

The lure was that it seemed to require no willpower. We could laugh in the face of boring old restraint and common sense.

BUT WE were wrong. Who could seriously treat a tomato as forbidden fruit for a lifetime? Who could afford steaks all round on a week night?

“I’m pleased to see that very low-carb diets are getting the push,” says nutritionist Angela Dowden. “We all know deep down what’s good for us. Fruit, veg, wholegrains, lean protein and low-fat dairy products. It’s just a case of showing some self-control.”

Indeed. But there’s the rub. Many of us are always on a diet, yet as a nation we’re getting fatter. Almost a quarter of us are clinically obese. We want to be svelte but not at the cost of sensibly curbing our greed or actually putting down the diet books, heaving ourselves out of the armchair and going out for a walk. We want a quick fix, the “magic bullet” that dieticians tell us wearily just does not exist. For a while, we thought we’d found it with Atkins.

Now that’s as passé as a poncho, I’m wondering what’s next. I’ve heard of this radical one called the “eat less and exercise more” thing but I don’t know. Where’s the book? The guru? The advertising campaign and the celebrity devotees? I mean, honestly. Like it could really be that simple...