

# Bread: Sales affected at some bakeries, but nobody's loafing

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North American Millers' Association, which represent many large bread companies, recently announced that they were joining forces to conduct a three-year public relations campaign aimed at countering the perception that carbohydrates are the enemy.

The campaign will not attack low-carb diets, Abenante said. Instead, it will stress the health benefits of bread.

**M**akers of whole-grain and artisan breads are taking the low-carb craze in stride.

"A few years ago, the craze was low-fat," said Gina Piccolino, executive director of the Bread Bakers Guild of America, which represents 350 mostly small, artisan bread bakers. "That passed, and so will low-carbs. Our sense is that low-carb diets were in high gear toward the end of last year and have already tempered somewhat."

She noted that the majority of her members have not felt a drop in sales, and some have even had increases. Roman Meal Co., which sells only whole-grain breads, has observed the craze, but president and CEO Bill Matthea said his company is not overly concerned. He labels the interest in low-carbs as a passing fad.

"Because of requests from customers, we've come out with a low-carb bread in some areas, although not in Sacramento," he said. "It seems to be proving moderately popular. But we still believe



Sara Lee and Atkins Nutritionals have met the low-carb challenge with specialty breads. Sacramento Bee/Owen Brewer

good carbohydrates are important to good health and don't see low-carb becoming a major part of our product line."

Matt Hall, vice president of communications for the Sara Lee Bakery Group (which markets Sara Lee, Rainbow and Earth Grains breads), acknowledges that sales of white breads have decreased but believes it cannot be attributed entirely to low-carb diets.

"Flour prices have gone up, and we've had to raise the price of our breads accordingly," he said. "Whenever you raise prices, there is bound to be some dip in sales."

"Anyway, it's a good thing that consumers are monitoring their food intake more carefully. When those who have stopped eating bread realize what they

really want to get away from is empty calories, not carbohydrates, they'll come back," Hall said.

To spend that return, his company has come out with low-carb Sara Lee Delightful white and whole-wheat breads.

"The extreme low-carb diet, we believe, will have a limited life," Hall said. "But the reasonable awareness of carbs and the effect they have on nutrition should be around for a long time."

Joe Artim, head baker at Grateful Bread Co. at 2543 Fair Oaks Blvd., said his customers occasionally ask about the carbohydrates in his breads, none of which are low-carb.

"We haven't noticed any decrease in sales in our own store, but in the some of the other stores where we sell our

**For dieters, a slice of life — or maybe two**

Atkins Nutritionals Inc., which sells a line of low-carb foods suitable for people on the Atkins diet, has been marketing a bread of its own for two years. Isn't this heretic?

"Yes, in the weight-loss phase, it is," concedes Colette Heimowitz, the firm's vice president of education and research. "But once you achieve your desired weight, a whole-grain, high-fiber bread is OK in moderation."

"Our bread has only 3 net carbs per slice" compared with an average of

about 10 in most breads, she says. Heimowitz said Atkins Nutritionals found that "the thing missed most by people on low-carb diets is bread."

That's why we developed one."

The Atkins Nutritionals bread, made with a mixture of soy, corn and wheat flours, is "very healthy," Heimowitz says.

"Even so, we recommend eating no more than two slices a day. We don't want people to rely too strongly on processed foods."

— Bob Masullo

bread there has been a very slight decrease," Artim said. "But we're not terribly worried." He said he is developing a naturally low-carb rye spelt bread.

Walter Goetzler of Freeport Bakery, Andy Smith of The Bread Store and Ettore Ravazzolo of Ettore's Restaurant and Bakery all say they have not noticed a decrease in bread sales at their shops. Smith reports a slight increase.

"Bread is healthy," Ravazzolo said. "Don't tell the French, Italians, Swiss or Germans (that) it isn't. They know the secret. Just eat it in moderation."

Sheila McCann, president of the House of Bread chain, which just opened a store at 1090 Pleasant Grove Blvd. in Roseville, agrees. She said some of her stores have been

affected by the craze. The chain sells a low-carb bread ("which took six months to develop; we couldn't get it to pass the 'swallow test' before that") but it accounts for less than 3 percent of sales.

"Everybody thinks this all started with Atkins," she said. "But that's not true. There were low-carb diets 70 years ago. They came and go in popularity. The present ones will, too."

Perhaps Goetzler, who has no plans to introduce a low-carb bread at Freeport Bakery, has the most succinct view of the phenomenon: "If you want less carbs, just slice the bread a little thinner."

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## Atkins aside, bread is still the carb king

By Bob Masullo  
BEE STAFF WRITER

**T**he most-quoted Christian prayer asks God to "give us this day our daily bread." Nevertheless, in recent months some people have come to regard bread as sinful.

Credit the low-carb craze. Bread is made up largely of carbohydrates. There are 10 or more "net carbs" in the average slice. If you eat two slices with each meal, that's 60 grams a day right there. Net carbs are what carb counters count. They are the total grams of carbohydrates minus the grams of fiber and sugar alcohols in a food.

Low-carb diets, especially in the beginning stages, call for cutting way back on net carbs. The first phase of the Atkins diet, for example, restricts net-carb intake from all foods to a maximum of 20 grams a day. That doesn't leave much room for bread. Avoiding bread, at least until the desired weight loss is achieved, is recommended by Atkins and most other low-carb diets.

This has had a chilling effect on the bread industry. Sales have dropped substantially in the past two years, according to Paul Abenante, president of the American Bakers Association. "It's had a measurable and significant effect," he said from his Washington, D.C., office. Although he would not cite dollar figures, he estimated the drop in sales at between 10 percent and 12 percent, most of it in the white bread category.

The bakers association and the  
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Suzanne Crachy shows off low-carb loaves at the House of Bread in Roseville.