
The Atkins Diet Opera

A restrictively nutritious mini-opera

words by Marc Abrahams

This mini-opera had its premiere as part of the 14th First Annual Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony, at Sanders Theatre, Harvard University, on Thursday evening, September 30, 2004. (That performance included an additional song, which is not given here.)

Video of the entire ceremony, including “The Atkins Diet Opera,” can be seen at the Improbable Research web site: www.improbable.com.

Original Cast

Pianist: Greg Neil

Dr. Atkins: Jason McStoots

Cats: Margot Button and Jane Tankersley

Scientific Advisors: Jane Tankersley and Margot Button

Coffee-Can-Can Dancers: Katie Hazard and Stacy Raphael, and the Ig Nobel Minordomos

Additional Advisors and Coffee-Can-Can Dancers: Nobel Laureates Dudley Herschbach, William Lipscomb and Rich Roberts, and all of the other dignitaries who were on stage, including the Ig Nobel Prize winners and Dr. Barry Sears (creator of the Zone Diet).



The main cast, moments before the performance. Clockwise from left: Jason McStoots, Greg Neil, Margot Button, Jane Tankersley. Photo: Robin Abrahams.

ACT 1 -- “Feed Me”

NARRATOR [SPOKEN]: Tonight’s opera is in four acts - - one now, three later. The opera is about a legend -- purely a legend. It has no basis in fact. None. Zip. Zero. At least we hope not.

Be that as it may... let’s join the legendary Dr. Atkins. He is all set to write his diet book. But first, there’s a little something he needs to do. He has to choose one food -- one simple, basic foodstuff -- to be the BASIS of the Atkins diet. But there are so MANY different foods to choose from. Which one will he pick?

Like all good-hearted people, Dr. Atkins often looks to his pet cats for inspiration. Join us now, as Dr. Atkins relaxes out in his yard, watching his beloved cats interact with nature.

[THIS IS SUNG BY TWO CATS. THEY ARE SLOPPILY, RAVENOUSLY EATING LITTLE ANIMALS. BY THE END OF THE SONG, THEY HAVE MEAT HANGING AND DRIPPING FROM THEIR MOUTHS.]

[MUSIC: ROSSINI’S “CAT DUET”]

Fee-ee-eed me!
Fee-ee-eed me!
Fee-ee-ee-ee-ee-eed me! Fee-ee-eed me!

Pro-o-tein
Makes good cuisine.
I enjoy umpteen types of protein.

Bean curd (Meow!)
Is absurd. (Meow!)

Margot Button (left)
and Jane Tankersley
are protein-eating role
models for Dr. Atkins.





Dr. Atkins explicates. Photo: Robin Abrahams.

Protein is best when it's feathered or furred.

Meow. Meow. Meow.

I like to lunch on birds.
Birds are too delicious for words.
I'd like to eat a cow...
I'm trying to figure out how.

Meow.

I like to chew on slugs,
And also nice delicious bugs.
But when I munch on lice...
The thing I really want is mice!
'Cause mice are fully twice as nutritious as lice.
The ratio of mice-to-lice is quite precise.

Don't get me wrong, though! I do eat veggies with my mice!
Yes, I eat veg'tables.
Yes, ample veggies to suffice.
Lots of grass and seeds and fruit, and sometimes even rice.
It's in the stomachs of the mice.
Meow!

ACT 2 -- "A Perfect Diet Regimen"

NARRATOR [SPOKEN]: Meat, meat, meat, meat, meat.
As all the world knows, Dr. Atkins chose meat as the basis for his diet. And the public went crazy -- buying as many copies of his diet book as they could get their ravenous little hands on. Of course, Dr. Atkins helped this along with some good, basic salesmanship! Let's join Dr. Atkins now, as he sings the well-balanced third act of tonight's opera.

[MUSIC: "AN ENGLISH COUNTRY GARDEN"]

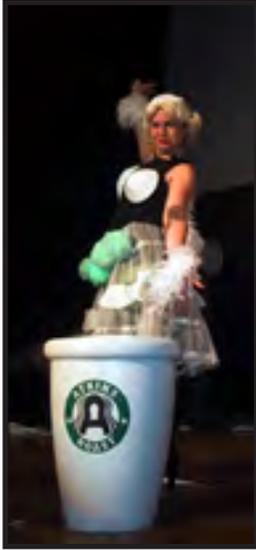
Some doctors say
An apple a day
Makes a perfect diet regimen.
Some make you pledge:
Eat nothing but veg
For a perfect diet regimen.
Many diets, I have heard,
Cut your intake to a third.
They're PERFECT diets -- at least, if you're a bird.
You'll eat just like a CAT
(And a nice FAT cat at that!)
With MY perfect diet regimen.

First, understand
That protein is GRAND
In a perfect diet regimen.
Nice juicy MEAT
Is what you SHOULD eat
In a perfect diet regimen.
Eat like an aristocrat --
Lots of steak, and lots of fat.
Bloody good eating! And what is wrong with that?
Eat it cooked, eat it raw.
Oh, just go ahead and gnaw!
It's a perfect diet regimen.

People demand
That something be banned

Dr. Atkins' eureka moment for a new Atkins Diet. Photo: John Bradley.





“Coffee Can-Can” dancer Stacy Raphael and a giant coffee cup. Photo: John Bradley.

In a perfect diet regimen.
That’s why I said
THOU SHALT NOT EAT
BREAD
In a perfect diet regimen.
I’ve identified the traits
That make carbohy--ydrates
One leading cause of high suicide rates.
So, forget the French fries;
They are not what I advise
In a perfect diet regimen.

Want to lose weight?

You want to feel great?
Try my perfect diet regimen.
It’s no conceit
To say it’s complete!
It’s a perfect diet regimen.
‘Course, my diet can’t erase
Laws that Nature put in place --
What really matters is: JUST DON’T STUFF YOUR
FACE!!!
But please put that aside.
Oh, I urge you now (with pride!):
Try MY perfect diet regimen.

ACT 3 -- “The New Atkins Diet”

NARRATOR [SPOKEN]: As you all know, the Atkins diet became the most popular diet EVER. Everyone followed it -- and everyone became slim and healthy. But now Doctor Atkins has a problem. What should he do with himself now? Join us as Dr. Atkins and his advisory board of distinguished scientists try to invent an all-new, all-improved, New Atkins Diet. What food will they choose as the basis of this new diet? Something simple, something commonplace. Something other than meat. What food will they choose?

[THERE ARE THREE SINGERS -- DR. ATKINS AND TWO ADVISORS. THE SCIENTISTS ON STAGE CAN JOIN IN IF THEY ARE COMFORTABLE DOING SO.]

[THERE ARE A TOTAL OF THREE VERSES. DR. ATKINS SINGS THE FIRST VERSE ALONE. THE REST IS SUNG AS A TRADITIONAL THREE-PART ROUND, WITH DR. ATKINS TAKING THE FIRST PART, AND THE ADVISORS TAKING THE SECOND AND THIRD. THE ENTIRE THING ENDS WITH THE DISCOURAGING REPETITION OF “NOT ENOUGH. NOT ENOUGH.”]

[MUSIC: “FRERE JACQUES”]

A portion of the Coffee Can-Can kickline, including Ig Nobel Biology Prize co-winners Magnus Wahlberg and Lawrence Dill. Photo: John Bradley.



How 'bout TOFU? How 'bout TOFU? It's great stuff! It's great stuff!
Is it titillating? Is it titillating?
Not enough. Not enough.

How 'bout SPINACH? How 'bout SPINACH? It's great stuff! It's great stuff!
Is it stimulating? Is it stimulating?
Not enough. Not enough.

How 'bout CABBAGE? How 'bout CABBAGE? It's great stuff! It's great stuff!
Is it captivating? Is it captivating?
Not enough. Not enough.

NARRATOR [SPOKEN]: Tofu doesn't cut it. Spinach won't fly. And cabbage is discouraging. But you can't keep a good diet doctor down. So join us now -- in the thrilling conclusion to the opera! -- as Dr. Atkins has a refreshing... and inspirational... cup of coffee.

DR. ATKINS [SPOKEN]: Tofu? Spinach? Cabbage? Blechhhhhhhhh! It's enough to put you off food. I need a cup of coffee!

[DR. ATKINS SIPES HIS COFFEE -- THEN RAISES THE CUP AND STARES AT IT, INSPIRED.]

DR. ATKINS [YELLED GLEEFULLY]: Coffee!!!

[MUSIC: "CAN-CAN," BY OFFENBACH]

[THE PACE IS AS SLOW AS IT NEEDS TO BE FOR THE WORDS TO BE SUNG AND UNDERSTOOD. NEAR THE END, A KICKLINE OF DANCERS APPEARS, WEARING COFFEE-FILTER-SKIRTS. SOME PEOPLE HOLD UP A BIG SIGN THAT SAYS "THE COFFEE CAN-CAN," AND EVERYONE ELSE WAVES COFFEE CUPS.]

Do you know the coffee diet?
Though it seems a bit obscure,
There's no reason not to try it.
It's so simple and so pure.

Coffee's good at elevating
Your base metabolic rate --
Gets your brainstem oscillating,
You feel vibrant! You feel great!

All you drink is coffee, coffee, co-o-ffee!
Lunch and dinner -- coffee, coffee, co-o-ffee!
You'll get thinner -- coffee, coffee, co-o-ffee!
Saint or sinner, everyone drinks
Coffee, coffee, coffee, coffee, coffee, coffee, coffee, coffee,
coffee,

Cooooooo--ffeeeeeeeeee !

[CHORUS:]

Oh! As an appetite suppressant
Coffee is incessant.
Yet it makes you effervescent!
Coffee is just so fab! It
Turns into a habit.
Keeps you hopping like a rabbit.
Here's why it's dietetic:
It's a diuretic --
Makes you GO, GO, GO! GO, GO, GO, GO! GO,
COFFEE!
You cannot get to sleep
Because you want to keep
On drinking, 'cause it's cheap.

Record-keeping for this diet.
Is so simple to keep up.
All you do to quantify it
Is to count each coffee cup.

Grandé, venti, more than twenty
Cups a day a habit makes...
Habit makes... habit makes... habit makes... habit
makes...
habit makes... habit makes... habit makes...
Habit habit habit habit habit habit habit habit.

[REPEAT THE CHORUS]

And it has no cholesterol!
It has no nutrients at all!
Coffee, coffee, coffee, coffee, coffee, coffee,
Cooooooo--ffeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee !

The rousing finale. Photo: John Bradley.

