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## The skinny on Big Papi's diet

By Gordon Edes  
ESPNBoston.com

FORT MYERS, Fla. -- [David Ortiz](#), who says he has dropped 20 pounds in the past two months and looks like it, is on a diet unlike any that most of you know.

For starters, he can't eat chicken, an enormous sacrifice for a guy who had *pollo* many nights growing up in his native Dominican Republic.

He can't eat egg whites, just the yolks.

No shrimp, but lobster, yes.

Some salmon, but no grouper.

Alcohol, no.

"I was in many resorts this winter, and all I did was watch people drink," he said. "I have a friend here who is the general manager of El Presidente [a popular Dominican beer]. He called me yesterday, and said, 'David, how much do you want me to send over?' I had to tell him, 'Never mind.'"



David Ortiz is as big as ever with Sox fans.

No bread. No sweets.

Beef, yes, and without restrictions. No one telling him he can't eat a steak bigger than a deck of cards.

And, of course, lots of salads and vegetables.

Ortiz, who says his weight is down to around 250 pounds, carries a business card-sized list of foods he cannot eat on his diet, which he started, he said, for reasons that had nothing to do with baseball. His cholesterol had risen to dangerously high levels. "Over 300," he said.

His agent, Fern Cuza, suggested he try it. Cuza carries around a similar list, though he admits to being not as devoted to sticking to it as Ortiz. "I take weekends off," the agent said.

Ortiz said the results have been almost immediately noticeable.

"I feel great," he said. "I can feel the difference when I swing the bat, and when I work out, I don't get as tired."

The beauty of his diet, he said, is that it is all natural, involving no supplements. The parameters were determined in a clinic in the Dominican Republic, where he underwent something called bioelectrical

impedance, which is a procedure that its proponents say can assess body composition, measuring body fat, lean muscle mass and intra- and extracellular fluids.

This was followed by what its inventors call the ALCAT test, an acronym for something called antigen leukocyte cellular antibody test. It is a blood test said to measure the body's response to various food and chemical substances at the cellular level. It claims to be able to tell what food "intolerances" or "sensitivities" an individual's body has, and from the results, a personal diet can be drawn. Ortiz's diet, for example, is not the same as Cuza's. It all depends on which foods are deemed intolerant for one's body.

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The testing is not cheap. Ortiz estimates he spent \$17,000 on the procedures.

Pseudo-science? There are those who believe so. Scientific societies in the United States, Europe, Australia and South Africa have all challenged the tests as unproven and have advised against their clinical use.

But it appears the tests are gaining wider acceptance, especially among nutritionists who work with professional athletes. [Minnesota Twins](#) first baseman [Justin Morneau](#), for example, recently underwent an ALCAT test and has modified his diet accordingly.

"The whole premise of food intolerance requires a pretty big leap, and there are major disagreements," said Amanda Carlson-Phillips, a registered dietitian who is the vice president of nutrition and research at Athletes Performance in Arizona, where many professional athletes train.

"The whole scientific premise is that certain foods are causing inflammatory responses," she said. "Identifying your food intolerances can cause a decrease in those responses, and people have experienced weight loss, become really lean, had fewer migraines, improved energy, less joint pain and other benefits.

"It's still a little left [of accepted science], pseudo-science, but we administer a similar test to some of our clients, and put them on a similar program with positive results."

The next wave, she predicts, will go beyond food to genetic testing.

"Anyone doing these [ALCAT] tests should only do so under the direction of a dietitian," she said, "to make sure that with the foods excluded, you're still finding the right balance. When you start removing sugar, yeast, egg whites, you need to find foods to replace them with.

"This is not for everyone and really is for people who are looking for the next step in upgrading their nutrition. Overall, the people who do this type of testing eat a lot healthier. If it makes people eat cleaner, healthier, then it is beneficial."

Ortiz was eager to undergo his physical Friday, to see how much his cholesterol has dropped. He is determined to remain faithful to his new regimen, believing it could add years to his career. There is one proviso, though.

"If I stop hitting bombs," he says, "I give up the diet."

*Gordon Edes covers the Red Sox for ESPNBoston.com.*

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