

NEW YORK POST

Last Updated: Fri., Apr. 15, 2011, 11:19am

No more weighty, Katie?

She's lost a lot of British pounds

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Posted: 11:03 PM, April 14, 2011



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Where has Kate's waist gone? Is she dieting for the big event, or is the stress of the entire world's attention getting to her?

Kate Middleton has always been little around the middle. However, the last photos taken of the princess-to-be before she went into seclusion to prepare for the royal wedding — a “walkabout” with Will in Lancashire on Monday — revealed a significantly thinner, almost gaunt, frame. And, of course, people are noticing — with royal watchers describing her as worryingly thin.

“Her body has always looked great and really trim, and that still looks great, but it’s in her face now, and she’s starting to look a little gaunt,” says Sally Kilbridge, deputy editor of *Brides* magazine.

Is Kate, 29, dieting too hard to get ready for her big day, or is the stress getting to her? Her mother, Carole, is confirmed to be on the Dukan diet, a French protein-and-lean-meat program that promises dramatic results — and it’s rumored that Kate is, too. Like the Atkins and South Beach diets, it bans certain foods (carbs are the enemy) to stimulate weight loss. Carole Middleton told an interviewer last fall that she had lost “4 pounds in four days.” “These quick weight-loss plans should be an entry into a healthier lifestyle,” says Dr. Frank Lipman of the Eleven Eleven Wellness Center, “as long as they’re short-term and you’re getting good nutrients. But a strong, fit body is more important than a skinny, sick body.” Middleton has admitted she’s trying to shed pounds. When a woman in Ireland last month told her not to lose more weight, she replied: “It’s all part of the plan!” (“It was an off-the-cuff comment,” a press aide told the AP, adding that her weight is “a hugely private matter.”) But yesterday, London’s *Sun* said Kate had to have her engagement ring resized; after losing so much weight, it was slipping off.

“She looks thin, but . . . I don’t think she’s on a mission to lose weight. It’s just one of these inevitable side effects of the excitement of getting married,” says Meaghan Murphy, fitness director of *Self* magazine. “It’s a product of anxiety and stress . . . the entire world is watching her.”

It is possible to lose weight healthily on a deadline, says Esther Blum, a registered dietitian and holistic nutritionist in New York. She’s helped plenty of women do just that before their big day by recommending a high-protein, low-carb plan to lose 1 to 2 pounds a week. Still,

she adds, “I wouldn’t want to see [Kate] lose any more weight. It’s almost like the royal palace is haunted, what with Diana’s eating disorder.”

In 1981, Diana reacted to the pressures of being a newly crowned princess by developing bulimia. Some worry that Kate’s rapid weight loss may have an effect on other brides-to-be.

“I would hope that brides won’t look at this royal wedding and think, she lost weight, now I’ll have to lose weight for my wedding,” says David Tutera, party planner to the stars and host of the WETv reality series “My Fair Wedding.”

But it’s important to remember Kate is not Diana, royal watchers say. She’s an independent university graduate with world travel and work experience under her belt — miles from the virginal, 19-year-old Diana when she married Prince Charles.

“I don’t think William will allow [eating problems] to happen to his wife,” says Anne Chertoff, former editor-in-chief of the Royal Wedding site at AOL. “William will do everything to protect [Kate] from that. Diana had no idea what she was in for — she was 19 at the time, and she was not worldly.”

After the big day, some of the pressure on Kate will be relieved. Kate and Wills won’t be living in Kensington Palace, but in a rental farmhouse in remote North Wales, where he’ll continue his work in the Royal Air Force. On April 30, the day after the wedding, says Kilbridge, “hopefully they’ll be able to kick back, put their feet up, have a big sandwich and relax.”

THE DUKAN DIET

Originally published in 2000, this diet was conceived by a French doctor, Pierre Dukan. The book — being released in the US on Tuesday — has sold 3 million copies worldwide. Dukan created four “phases” to kick-start and then maintain weight loss.

* Phase 1: Eat only “pure proteins,” such as lean meats and egg whites, plus oat bran and tons of water.

* Phase 2: Add vegetables to Phase 1.

* Phase 3: Introduce fruit, bread and cheese

* Phase 4: To keep weight off while eating what you want, “eat only lean protein one day a week . . . for the rest of your life and three tablespoons of oat bran daily.