

Dear *Walk Across Texas* Participant,

Included with this letter is the eighth topic of the Weight Management Series called “Fad Diets, Weight Loss Supplements, and Practices.” The goal of this topic is to prevent the use of possibly dangerous weight loss methods.

To help you reach this goal, look for key points while reading “Fad Diets, Weight Loss Supplements, and Practices.”

- \$33 billion a year is spent on products and services for weight control in America.
- Two basic factors for weight management are balancing the number of calories eaten each day with the number of calories used each day.
- Fad diets result in weight loss because of calorie restriction.
- Prolonged use of fad diets could be very dangerous to your health because they are not nutritionally balanced.
- Substances in herbal dietary products can be dangerous if taken with some drugs or if you have high blood pressure.
- Most weight loss practices are ineffective.

Happy Walking!

Sincerely,

Weight Management Series — Health Break 8

Fad Diets, Weight Loss Supplements, and Practices

Goal:

To prevent the use of fad diets, weight loss supplements, and practices

Objectives:

Participants will:

- Name tips to recognize fad diets.
- List three of the most common unbalanced fad diet approaches.
- Read labels of “natural” supplements for potentially dangerous substances.
- Name weight loss practices to avoid.
- No longer be taken in by promises of quick and easy weight loss claims.

Key Teaching Points:

- \$33 billion a year is spent on products and services for weight control in America.
- Two basic factors for weight management are balancing the number of calories eaten each day with the number of calories used each day.
- Fad diets result in weight loss because of calorie restrictions.
- Prolonged use of fad diets could be very dangerous to your health because they are not nutritionally balanced.
- Substances in herbal dietary products can be dangerous if taken with some drugs or if you have high blood pressure.
- Most weight loss practices are ineffective.

Activity:

- Have a discussion with participants about different bogus diets, supplements, or practices they have seen on television, read about, or heard of in the last year. Discuss how they knew the topic was a fad. Talk about why some people are taken in.

Evaluation

- Yes No 1. Fad diets are “miracle” diets that promote healthy weight loss.
- Yes No 2. Fad diets can be dangerous if used for a long time.
- Yes No 3. Most fad diets have a variety of food choices.
- Yes No 4. Herbal dietary supplements are always safe to use.
- Yes No 5. Weight loss devices usually do not work.

Answers: 1. No; 2. Yes; 3. No; 4. No; 5. Yes

Fad Diets, Weight Loss Supplements, and Practices

Approximately \$33 billion a year is spent in the United States for products and services to control weight. Most of this money is wasted on fad diets, dietary supplements, and weight loss practices.

Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight is not easy. Calories you eat that are not used during the day will be stored as fat in your body. Remember, the two basic factors for weight management are balancing the:

1. Number of calories eaten each day with the
2. Number of calories used each day

We all would like to find a “miracle” diet or product to help us maintain a healthy weight. Unfortunately, there are people who promote diets, weight loss aids, and questionable practices that offer a “miracle.” Do not be taken in by such claims.

Fad Diets

Many fad diets will result in weight loss because they restrict calorie intake. Too often, fad diets are dangerous to your health if followed for long periods. Tips to help you recognize a fad diet are:

- It promises a loss of more than 2 pounds a week.
- It suggests that a nutrient or food group is the key to losing weight or the reason for being overweight.
- It claims to be a revolutionary idea.
- It reports testimonials instead of research.
- It refers to the author’s own case histories, but does not give details.
- It claims 100% success.
- The promoter claims persecution by the medical profession.

Most fad diets lack important nutrients or whole food groups making them nutritionally unbalanced. Three of the most common unbalanced approaches are:

- Complete fasting (starvation) or water only diet — You drink only water and have nothing else for several days. Prolonged fasting can lead to brain damage, anemia, liver impairment, kidney stones, low blood pressure, mineral imbalance and other adverse effects.
- Supplemented fasting or very low calorie diets (800 calories or less) — You are encouraged to take supplements to provide the vitamins and minerals that are not being provided by your diet. The programs may be liquid or food diets.
- Low-carbohydrate/high-protein diets — You do not have to limit the intake of proteins, fats, or total calories, but you must limit your carbohydrates. Diets low in calories and carbohydrates will produce a rapid initial weight loss due to chemical changes within the body.

These approaches are unbalanced because they do not meet the recommendations of the Food Guide Pyramid.

Weight Loss Supplements

In 1992, a ban on a number of substances used in weight loss products went into effect. These can no longer be used as weight loss products, but can be used as “dietary supplements.” The substances include, arginine, caffeine, kelp, guar gum, lecithin, papaya enzymes, phenylalanine, tryptophan, vitamin B6, and 102 other substances.

Many herbal dietary products which claim to aid weight loss have some of the above substances in them. Most herbal products boast they are safe diet aids because they are all natural. Ma Huang is a natural herb that contains ephedrine, a decongestant and nervous-system stimulant. Even though ephedrine is a natural product, it can be dangerous if taken with some drugs or if you have high blood pressure. Check with your health care provider before taking any dietary supplements to ensure your safety.

Weight Loss Practices

Many devices and procedures have made claims that they can reduce weight with little or no effort. Beware of the following:

- **Body Wrapping:** Wraps or garments are used with or without special lotions or creams to trim inches off the body. The garments may be applied to parts of the body or the entire body to “melt away” fat and trim inches from the body. Body wraps may cause temporary water loss as a result of sweating. The water will be replaced as soon as drinking and eating takes place.
- **Cellulite Removers:** Cellulite is a term to describe dimpled fat around the thighs and buttocks. “Cellulite” is not a medical term, and medical authorities agree it is simply ordinary fatty tissue. Experts agree that no equipment, exercise, or nonsurgical procedure will remove fat from a single area of the body. Body fat is determined by individual eating and exercise habits, but body fat distribution is determined by heredity.
- **Rubber Sweatsuits:** Work along the lines of body wrapping. They cause weight loss due to water loss. Once you drink water or eat food, the water loss is replaced and you haven’t lost any weight.
- **Spot Reducers:** Some products claim to remove fat from a specific area of the body. Studies show that fat cannot be reduced in specific areas. Exercise does burn fat and calories, but it does this throughout the body and not just in a specific area. There is no such thing as spot-reducing.

Do not be taken in by promises of quick and easy weight loss. Avoid weight loss practices as well as buying remedies, books, or supplements if they:

- Claim a “secret ingredient”
- Talk about “magical powers”
- Are available by mail only
- Claim that hard things like losing weight are easy
- Make claims too good to be true
- Stress that natural is better