

Weight Loss Diets: Separating Fad from Fact

Some people will try almost any diet if there is a glimmer of hope that it will help them reach the proverbial, but often unrealistic, "ideal" weight. Many of these diets are often advertised with claims like "lose weight overnight" or "proven to work." But how does a person know if a weight loss diet is truth or fiction? If you are thinking about trying a diet that has one or more of these characteristics, you might want to think about other safe and healthful approaches to weight management.

Fad: Diets that promote fat-burning foods.



Fact: No food has been shown to melt away body fat. In fact, if a person eats more than the body needs, the body uses the excess energy to make fat.

Fad: Diets that promise rapid weight loss

(**Exception:** medically supervised weight-loss programs)



Fact: At the beginning, most of the weight lost on these diets is water. After that, if one is losing more than 2 pounds per week, the chances are pretty good that some of that weight is muscle. Losing muscle lowers the body's metabolism and will likely lead to weight gain once the diet is stopped.

Fad: Diets that claim you can lose weight without exercising.



Fact: Healthful weight management requires a combination of eating less and moving more. Activities like walking or bike riding not only help manage your weight, but they can also help lower your risk for developing chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer.

Fad: Diets that include large amounts of a specific food.

Fact: These diets are boring and often lack one or more important nutrients. In addition, following these diets may lead to some unpleasant side effects including bloating and intestinal gas.



Fad: Diets that use the results of a single study to prove its success.

Fact: One study is not enough to conclude the success of a weight loss diet.



Fad: Diets that promote strict menus and specific times to eat.

Fact: Such diets don't take into account the taste preferences of Americans. Plus, these diets are usually so strict that they are too difficult to follow for any length of time, leading to disappointment when weight loss doesn't occur or is not maintained.



Fad: Diets that include supplements or special products.



Fact: Most likely, the only weight you will lose here is in your wallet. Vitamin or mineral supplements are usually not needed unless the calorie level of the diet is less than 1200 calories a day. If you are following a diet this low in calories, you should be under the care of a registered dietitian or physician to make sure that your nutrient needs are being met.

Fad: A diet that promotes changing your eating habits for just a short period of time.



Fact: These types of diets don't lead to long-term weight management or healthful eating habits. Any weight that is lost is probably water weight, so regaining that lost weight is very likely.

Fad: Diets that label foods as "good" or "bad."



Successful weight management requires a reduction in calorie (or energy) intake **and** an increase in physical activity. Choose an eating plan that includes sensible portions and a variety of foods including fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Try to be physically active for at least 30 minutes each day; if you are trying to lose weight, increase physical activity to at least 60 minutes for most days of the week.

For more information about healthful weight management, contact your County Extension Agent or Registered Dietitian.

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Fact: Healthful eating for successful weight management means **all** foods can fit on the plate. Forbidding specific foods or food groups (such as carbohydrates) is unhealthy, unrealistic, and may lead to bingeing or cheating (and more disappointment).

Fad: Diets that do not include a warning for persons with chronic diseases (like diabetes or hypertension) to check with their doctor before starting any weight loss diet.



Fact: Some fad diets may raise blood pressure or blood sugar, even if weight is lost. Diets that are high in fat may lead to an increased risk for heart disease and cancer. In addition, high protein diets can strain the kidneys or liver in persons with kidney or liver disease. Children, teens, pregnant women and adults 65 years and older should not try to lose weight unless they are under the care of a physician.

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