



Fact Sheet

Student Health Services, Texas A&M University

Fad Diets

Every year Americans spend \$40 billion on diets and diet related products. The healthiest way to lose weight and keep it off is by permanent lifestyle changes. Instead of going on a “diet”, begin making small changes in eating and exercise patterns. Soon, the small changes become a habit and are incorporated into your lifestyle.

Fad diets are risky because they...

- tend to be very low in calories
- are limited to few foods, limiting key nutrients and minerals
- produce only short term, rapid weight loss--not long term weight management
- ignore the importance of physical activity in healthy weight loss
- increase risks for certain diseases or health complications
- take the pleasure and fun out of eating
- alter metabolism, making it easier to regain the weight after the diet has ceased

Diets that don't work

1. Food-Specific Diets (i.e. grapefruit, cabbage soup, Subway diet)

Some diets are based on one food with special properties that can cause weight loss. Eating just one food while excluding others can result in weight loss because you end up not eating the food or enough food to maintain your weight. These diets don't teach healthy eating habits and are usually not nutritionally balanced. They are usually very low in calories.

2. High Protein Diets (i.e. Atkins)/ Low Carbohydrate

These diets are based on the idea that carbohydrate is bad and that many people are insulin-resistant which causes them to gain weight when they eat it. Authors of these diets are quick to point out that people eating more carbohydrates--which nutrition professionals recommend--are heavier than before. What they don't tell you is that people are eating **more** calories which is the **real** reason they are gaining weight.

3. Liquid diets (i.e. Slimfast)

There are over-the-counter liquid meal replacements and very low calories diets that require medical prescription and supervision. These should not be used for long-term weight loss and they actually plateau after three months. Both regimens serve a short term purpose, however, they don't teach good life-long habits.

4. Gimmicks, Gadgets, and Other “Miracles”

Pros – none; Cons – may be harmful, expensive, do not teach healthy eating, do not encourage exercise

Effective weight loss questionnaire

Could you follow the diet for the rest of your life?

Good health and permanent weight loss require a lifestyle change, not just a temporary modification.

Does the diet promise quick results?

If so, you're probably losing water and lean muscle tissue. Weight loss of 1/2 lb to 2lbs a week is safe and will more likely be kept off.

Does the diet accommodate your lifestyle?

Any diet that does not allow much freedom or flexibility is less likely to be followed permanently.

Is the diet very low in calories?

Any diet that is below 1200 calories per day could be dangerous. You may not be getting enough energy and nutrients. You may feel deprived and frustrated, both physically and mentally. In the long run, metabolism slows in order to conserve energy with very low calorie diets.

Does the diet eliminate or restrict certain food groups?

Many diets leave out one or more food groups. Restricting a type of food may result in elimination of essential nutrients in the diet causing health risks. A balanced diet modeled after the Food Guide Pyramid, and including a variety of foods should be followed.

Does the diet call for unusual items or require you to go to a specialty store?

Unusual foods or supplements may be very costly and hard to obtain. They may also contain dangerous ingredients that are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration.

Will someone make money on the diet?

If yes, BEWARE! The diet could be a quick way for someone to make a lot of money.

Is the author or supplier reputable?

To check for validity and credibility of a book, diet, or supplement, view the list of references provided and check the credentials of the author.

Getting started on a healthy weight loss plan

- Consult your health professional
- Learn the basics of good nutrition
- Consume 250-500 fewer calories each day, either through consuming less food and/or increasing exercise, while eating a balanced diet with lots of variety
- Limit fats, sweets, & high calorie foods
- Use lower-fat cooking styles: roasting, grilling, broiling, steaming
- Ask for low fat dishes when you eat out!
- Give into your cravings with a small portion
- Try new low fat recipes!
- Drink water while eating. It helps to fill you up
- Avoid "drinking" extra calories (through sodas and/or alcohol)
- Incorporate 3-5 servings of low calorie fruits and vegetables
- Exercise for 30-45 minutes, 5 times a week
- Safe weight loss should be 1/2 to 2 lbs. each week