



# Fad Diets



**E**very year a variety of nutritionally imbalanced, unhealthy diets are circulated among those looking to lose weight. The diets all promise quick weight loss. Many of these diets, including the infamous *cabbage soup diet*, can actually undermine your health, causing physical discomfort and frustration when you gain all the weight you lost back.

In the United States, over sixty-four percent of the population is estimated to be overweight; with thirty percent estimated as obese. Obesity increases the risk for developing many chronic disease states, including heart disease, hypertension, stroke, diabetes, and elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels.



## How to Recognize a Fad Diet

The American Heart Association (AHA) has declared war on fad diets. AHA suggests using the following criteria to recognize a fad diet.

- ◆ **Magic or miracle foods** that burn fat. Foods don't burn fat. If we eat more than we need (too many calories), the extra food energy is stored as fat.
  - ◆ **Bizarre quantities** of only one food or type of food. All foods can be a part of a healthy diet. But eating large quantities of one food could lead to intestinal gas, bloating,
- flatulence and bad breath, as well as nutritional imbalances that could have a serious impact on your health. Emphasizing only one food or food type is also boring.
  - ◆ **Rigid menus.** Some fad diets allow a very limited selection of foods which must be eaten exactly as written and at a specific time and day. These limited diets don't allow for the taste preferences of a diverse American population.
  - ◆ **Specific food combinations.** There is no scientific evidence that eating foods in certain sequences or combinations has any scientific or medical benefit.
  - ◆ **Rapid weight loss** of more than two pounds a week can be dangerous over a long period of time.
  - ◆ **No health warning** for individuals with chronic diseases such as diabetes or high blood pressure to seek medical advice before going on the diet. Some fad diets can have a serious impact on your health even if you lose weight.
  - ◆ **No increased physical activity.** To lose and maintain weight loss, physical activity needs to be an integral part of the diet plan.



## Popular Fad Diets

**Low- and no-carbohydrate diets** recommend a high intake of fat or protein but a very low or no intake of carbohydrate. Examples include:

- ✧ The South Beach Diet
- ✧ The Complete Scarsdale Medical Diet
- ✧ The Grapefruit Diet, also called the Magic Mayo Diet or Mayo Clinic Diet
- ✧ The 3-Day Diet
- ✧ The Dr. Atkins Diet Revolution
- ✧ Dr. Sears' Enter the Zone Diet

These diets are popular because a rapid weight loss occurs right away. Unfortunately, fat is not what is lost; water is. When the diet is discontinued, the body corrects the water imbalance causing weight gain.

Normally, carbohydrates are used as the body's main source of energy. Excess carbohydrates are converted to fat and stored as fat tissue. On a low- or no-carbohydrate diet, instead of using carbohydrates as the energy source, fats from foods and fats stored in the body are used for energy. But, the body needs carbohydrates to completely oxidize the fat. The short supply of carbohydrate causes the fat to breakdown incompletely, forming ketone bodies. To rid the body of these toxic ketones, large amounts of water is excreted. Extra water is then needed to avoid dehydration.

When the body produces more ketones than the kidneys can get rid of, ketones accumulate in the blood,

causing ketosis. Ketosis causes the body to burn calories similarly to a fasting or starvation state. This is an abnormal and dangerous condition, especially over a long period of time. (Ketones depress appetite, which is the body's way of conserving energy so death doesn't occur as soon as starvation begins.)

The Food and Nutrition Board of the National Research Council has suggested that normal adults need a minimum of 500 of their daily calories from carbohydrate sources. Diets that contain less than 500 calories from carbohydrate sources use protein and fat for energy. As a result, lean muscle mass is lost.

Opposite of the low-carbohydrate diets are the **high-carbohydrate, high-fiber** diets that contain low levels of protein and fat.

Examples include:

1. Pritikin Diet Plan
2. Save-Your-Life Diet

The American Medical Association (AMA) has questioned the safety and effectiveness of high-carbohydrate diets, particularly regarding the diseases they are supposed to prevent. High carbohydrate diets can lead to lowered immunity and poor wound healing because of the lower fat and protein intakes.

The **liquid formula diets** are supposed to supply all nutrients needed at a controlled calorie level, usually around 400 calories. Examples include:

1. Liquid Formula Preparations
2. Cambridge Diet (Protein-Sparing Modified Fast)

The danger of the protein-sparing modified fast diet is that it is usually self-prescribed. The Food and Drug Administration requires the following warning statement to appear on products providing less than 400 calories per day: *Very low-calorie*

*protein diets may cause serious illness or death. Do not use for weight reduction without medical supervision.*

Total fasting or self-imposed starvation has definite health risks including reduction or depletion of lean body tissues, fluids, mineral, and vitamin supplies. Side effects commonly seen include anemia, kidney stones and gout, as well as weakness, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, fainting, and emotional disturbances. A strain on vital organs may occur without the dieter's awareness and it may be difficult to begin eating again.

Other popular diets include:

- Cider Vinegar
- Lecithin
- Kelp
- Vitamin B<sub>6</sub> Diet
- Zen Macrobiotic Diet

These diet plans encourage eating only one food, which can lead to nutritional deficiencies and starvation. It can also cause anemia, malnutrition, decreased renal function, and ultimately death.

## **Diet Aids**

Diet aids are readily available and examples include:

- Dexatrim
- Caffeine Pills
- Ephedrine
- Redux
- Phen/Fen

There is no scientific data to support claims that weight loss from diet aids is permanent. Some appetite suppressants contain caffeine and phenylpropanolamine (PPA). According to AMA, risks associated with PPA include temporary dramatic elevations of blood pressure, dizziness, nervousness, nausea, and insomnia. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has requested that PPA be removed from the market.

Diet pills containing ephedrine are particularly dangerous. Ephedrine is a bronchial dilator medication used to treat allergies and hay fever. Both ephedrine and caffeine can cause side effects including addiction, headaches, high blood pressure, heart palpitations, and heart attack. In addition, don't be fooled by pills claiming to be "all-natural." Herbal products are not regulated by FDA and may not even contain what the label indicates they do.

Medications like Redux and Phen/Fen are prescription medications designed to be used with permission of a doctor in extreme cases of obesity. However, these pills are often misused and can cause the same life-threatening side effects as their over-the-counter equivalents.

## **Lose Weight Permanently-- the Right Way**

For a person trying to lose weight permanently, fad diets and diet aids are of little value. Many of these diets and products can cause physical and emotional harm. Diet plans should be personally developed by a dietitian or nutritionist for the individual.

**There is a simple way  
to lose weight!  
EAT LESS and GET ACTIVE!**

Think of it as a simple equation....

**WEIGHT LOSS =  
Eating Fewer Calories +  
Increased Physical Activity**

One pound of fat equates to 3,500 calories. So if you eat 500 calories a day less than you usually eat for 7 days, you would lose 1 pound in a week. (500 x 7 = 3,500)

Add physical activity that you enjoy and include a friend for 30 to 60 minutes

every day. Physical activity will burn more calories, speed up weight loss, improve your cardiovascular health, and

make you feel better about yourself, all at the same time.

<b>DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO WEIGHT LOSS: ADVANTAGES &amp; DISADVANTAGES</b>		
<b>Approach</b>	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<b>Diets</b>		
Moderate kcalorie restriction diets (1200-1800 kcal) - Weight Watchers                      - American Heart Assoc Diet - Slim Chance in a Fat World        - The Setpoint Diet	Safe	Slow weight loss may be discouraging
Low-Carbohydrate diets <100g/day> - South Beach Diet                    - Calories Don't Count Diet - Atkins Diet Revolution              - The Doctor's Quick Weight Loss Diet - Drinking Man's Diet                 - T-Factor Diet - The Complete Scarsdale Medical Diet	Rapid initial weight loss	Cause weakness, ketosis and poor stamina. Very high in fat, much of initial weight loss is water
Extremely low-fat diets (<20% kcal from fat) -The Rice Diet Report                - The Pritikin Diet - The Pasta Diet                        - The 35+ Diet - T-Factor Diet                         - Fit or Fat - The Maximum Metabolism Diet	Normal portions, variety, decreased risk of heart disease and cancer	Little satiety, flatulence, decreased absorption of minerals and fat soluble vitamins, low palatability
Novelty diets (promote certain nutrients, foods or combinations) - Fit for Life Diet                      - The Rotation Diet - The Beverly Hills Diet              - The Junk Food Diet - Dr. Berger's Immune Power Diet	May promote rapid weight loss	Nutritionally inadequate, don't promote permanent change in food habits or body weight
Very-low-kcalorie diets (<800 kcal/day) - Optifast                                - Cambridge Diet - The Rotation Diet                    - The Last Chance Diet - Medifast	Quick Weight Loss	Can be dangerous if not supervised by a physician
Formula diets - Optifast                                - Cambridge Diet - The Last Chance Diet                - USA (United Sciences of America), Inc. - Slimfast                                - Herbalife	Eliminates behavior cues and food decisions	Don't learn to modify behavior unless done with a behavior modification program
Pre-measured diets - Jenny Craig - Nutri-System	Safe, effective eliminates decision-making from eating	Expensive, may not foster sound eating behavior later
<b>BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION</b>	Safe, long-term effectiveness	Slow weight loss
<b>EXERCISE</b>	Safe, long-term effectiveness	Slow weight loss
<b>DRUGS</b>	Decrease cravings	Dangerous, no behavior change, side effects
<b>SURGERY</b>	Easy for recipient	Dangerous, no behavior change, expensive, requires hospitalization

**References**

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