The Truth about Fad Diets

For months, low-carb was the hottest fad diet around for weight loss. Whether with Atkins, South Beach, the Zone, or other protein-packed regimens, dieters were dropping pounds while eating rich, low-carb foods such as butter, steak, and pepperoni pizza (but without the yummy crust). Now the trend has shifted, as it always does with fad diets. Tired of facing a hamburger patty and bowl of lettuce night after night, many people are rethinking this dieting extreme.

What's with all the fad diets out there? Whether low-carb, low-calorie, or low-fat, someone always has a gimmick to sell that's supposed to help you lose weight (and look as hot as the models who advertise these products).

"10 Ways to Lose Weight Without Dieting!" Sure, you can lose weight quickly. There are plenty of fad diets that work to shed pounds rapidly -- while leaving you feeling hungry and deprived. But what good is losing weight only to regain it? To keep pounds off permanently, it's best to lose weight slowly. And many experts say you can do that without going on a "diet."

Instead, the key is making simple tweaks to your lifestyle. One pound of fat -- is equal to 3,500 calories. By shaving 500 calories a day through dietary and exercise modifications,...But wait! Has anyone been able to stay on these deprivation diets for a long period of time? And if they did lose weight, did the pounds stay off once they went back to a more normal eating style?

Look at the following fad diets, and see how many you've tried:
• Low-carb diet
• Low-fat diet
• Liquid diet (using low-calorie, high-fiber shakes)
• Grapefruit diet
• Detox diet
• Cabbage Soup diet
• Macrobiotic diet
• The juice diet

If you've followed at least one of these diets, you have plenty of company. Problem is, if a diet really worked, we'd all be on it, and we'd stay on it. The reality is that fad diets don't work to help you lose weight and keep it off.

So what does work? Eating fewer calories than you burn off. That's it, plain and simple. Calories really do count -- no matter what you've read in magazine articles. If you really want to trim down, the most effective way is to eat a variety of healthful foods, exercise 60 minutes every day, and stop super-sizing your meals.

Variety Is Key for a Healthy Diet

Just as a car needs the proper gasoline to make it run, a body needs a healthy diet -- the right balance of protein, carbohydrates, and fat to develop properly, as well as a host of other nutrients.

Each vitamin or mineral regulates a bodily process. For instance, the mineral calcium keeps bones strong and helps to prevent low bone density and fractures. Vitamin A is important to keep your skin smooth and healthy.

Vitamin C helps protect your body against infection. Vitamin E stimulates the function of T-cells, which are important fighters in your immune system. When you go on a fad diet and exclude any of the necessary nutrients, you're putting yourself at risk for illness. Getting too little of a specific nutrient may not cause a problem immediately. But if it's depleted for a long period of time, you may suffer health consequences.

Practice Portion Control

Researchers have concluded that it may not be just the type of foods we're eating causing America's obesity epidemic but also the portion sizes. Food servings have grown larger and larger over the years. And fast food restaurants aren't the only places you'll find super-sized meals.

In a study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association, researchers looked into foods such as hamburgers, burritos, tacos, French fries, sodas, ice cream, pie, cookies, and salty snacks. They found that between the 1970s and the 1990s, portion sizes increased -- whether people ate these foods at home or at restaurants.

Here are some of the findings about our diets: In a study in the American Journal of Public Health, researchers found that cookies are 700% bigger than USDA standards. Also, cooked pasta, muffins, steaks, and bagels exceeded USDA standards by 480%, 333%, 224%, and 195%, respectively.

And just what does a healthy serving size look like? Here are some guidelines to keep in mind:
• A cup of fruit should be no larger than your fist.
• One ounce of meat or cheese is about the same as the size of your thumb from base to tip.
• Three ounces of meat, fish, or poultry (a normal serving) is about the size of your palm.
• One to two ounces of nuts equals your cupped hand.

Here are some more tips to help with portion (and calorie) control:
• Serve your meals on salad plates instead of large dinner plates.
• Store snack foods in tiny sandwich bags so you are sure you're eating no more than one portion.
• When ordering out, share your entrée with a friend.
• Ask for a kids' meal or small size. Never go for a super-size portion.

• Fill up on fresh green salads, fruit, and vegetables instead of high-fat foods, breads, pasta, and desserts.

Losing Weight Without Fad Diets

The best diet is not a diet at all but a way of life that lets you "eat to live," as you enjoy healthy food, exercise, and optimal health. If you think you need to lose weight, talk with your doctor about your "ideal" weight. Ask your doctor the number of calories you need to lose weight and to maintain an ideal weight. (Remember, to lose weight, you need to eat fewer calories than you burn with exercise.)

Here are some tips for healthy weight loss:
• Eat a variety of foods -- lean protein; complex carbohydrates such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables; and "good" fats, like omega-3 fats from fish and mono-unsaturated fats from avocados, nuts, and olives or olive oil.
• Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily. Chose different colors of fruits and vegetables to ensure optimal nutrition.
• Say NO to bad fats, like saturated fats from animal sources and trans fats from fried foods, and snack and fast food products.
• Be careful about portion sizes. If you must have seconds, serve yourself vegetables.
• Exercise at least 60 minutes every day.
• Clean out the kitchen and eliminate all junk food. Toss out high-calorie, high-fat foods that will tempt you to overeat -- chips, cookies, crackers, ice cream, candy bars, etc.
• Fill your kitchen with lean protein, fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds, good fats, and low-fat dairy products.
• Eat smaller meals more frequently. Five to six per day may be best. Space your meals every three to four hours throughout your day. Try taking low fat cheese and whole grain crackers to school for a snack, or eat a tablespoon of peanut butter with one slice of whole grain bread after school. Find foods that are healthy and that keep you full.
• If you like lots of food on your plate, fill up with a large salad and a super serving of green beans, broccoli, cabbage, kale, or other low calorie vegetable.
• Snack on berries. Dark berries (blueberries, blackberries, cherries, and raspberries) help strengthen the immune system and keep you well. They are also low in calories and fat, and high in fiber.
• Avoid "empty calories" including sugar-containing sodas and fruit drinks.
If you need more information on weight loss and dieting, talk to your primary health care practitioner or a registered dietitian. Also, ask friends, family, or coworkers to join you as you work to change your eating habits and pare down your weight. Sticking to a weight loss plan is much easier when you have someone to support you.

<http://www.webmd.com/diet/guide/the-truth-about-fad-diets?page=2>