



# The Health Risks of Fad Diets

## EXTENSION

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Fad diets have grown in popularity in recent years. This is due to the rise in obesity, social media use and society's pressure to be thin. Fad diets are presented as a cure for quick weight loss and health changes. Most fad diets limit what you can eat and can harm your health. Fad diets are not easy to spot and hide under false scientific claims. However, they are widely accepted by the general population.

So, what are fad diets? If the diet seems too good to be true, it is likely a fad diet. Some fad diets are called low-carbohydrate, extremely low-fat and/or high-protein. Some promote high intake of a certain food, like grapefruit or celery juice. Others will focus on eliminating certain foods overall. Fad diets often are created by people with little knowledge on their long-term health effects.

All fad diets have the same underlying principle:  
**a temporary, often unproven, solution for a long-term problem.**

Fad diets generally have the following characteristics:

- Promote a quick fix.
- Promise dramatic results.
- Restrict or eliminate a particular food or food group.
- Severely restrict calories.
- Forbid or overly encourage one particular macronutrient such as protein, carbohydrates or fat.
- Promise rapid weight loss.
- Promote detoxification, cleansing or fasting.
- Promote liquid meal replacements.
- Are based on personal experiences or a single research study.
- Have rigid and unmanageable rules.

Popular fad diets often lead to rapid, short-term weight loss. This short-term weight loss is achieved through extreme measures, like eliminating entire food groups or eating a very small amount of food each day.

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This leads to a dieting cycle:

Individuals restrict food intake → lose weight → feel deprived → overeat → regain weight → feel disappointed and guilty → experience negative emotions (stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem) → repeat the cycle.

This is also called yo-yo dieting and is associated with poor health outcomes, including high risk for eating disorders, malnutrition, impaired quality of life and well-being, bone diseases, anemia, metabolic abnormalities, hormone deficiencies and heart problems.

### Use Caution

Fad diets can be harmful to your health. There is no research proving fad diets are safe in the long term. However, a strong desire to improve health or lose weight often leads people to fad diets.



## Health Risks of Fad Dieting

- Body dissatisfaction
- Greater obsession with thinness and body
- Lower self-esteem
- Risk for developing eating disorders
- Higher death rates with intense calorie restriction
- Nutrient deficiencies
- Muscle loss
- Higher risk for heart disease
- Electrolyte imbalances
- Impaired bone health
- Infertility

## A Healthy Way to Lose Weight

A good question to ask is “can I eat this way forever and be in good health?” If the answer is yes, it is likely a manageable lifestyle. If the answer is no, it is likely a fad diet.

When searching for information to help you lose weight or improve health, consult a Registered Dietitian, the trusted food and nutrition expert. Use resources provided by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, other medical professional organizations or associations and government health agencies. A weight loss of 1 pound to 2 pounds per week is a healthy approach. Individuals who lose weight at this pace tend to keep the weight off long term and experience improvements in health.

To avoid the negative effects of fad dieting, a balanced, less restrictive approach may be the most doable option. It is unlikely that individuals will never eat cake or pizza ever again, so any fad diet that encourages complete avoidance of these foods or others, is not a good choice for most people.

Another good place for healthy nutrition advice is ChooseMyPlate.gov. MyPlate focuses on balance, variety, moderation

and adequacy and supports healthy eating for everyone. MyPlate provides nutrition recommendations based on five food groups (fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy and protein foods). MyPlate Plan will even provide a simple plan to meet your needs and goals.\*

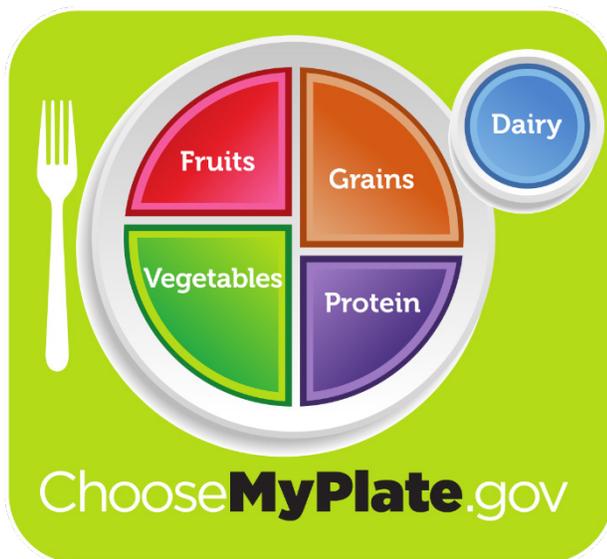
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\*Disclosure: Some medical conditions require special dietary changes and habits. If this is the case, consult with and follow the advice of your doctor or Registered Dietitian.



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