

Debunking Fad Diets: Signs your diet is doing more harm than good

By Sheldon Riklon, M.D.

For those looking to improve their health, fad diets are often a tempting solution. While these trendy eating plans may promise fast results, they often fail to deliver sustainable benefits. Overall, fad diets may not be the best approach for long-term health.

Most fad diets are restrictive, meaning they require you to cut out certain foods altogether. This can lead to short-term weight loss, but maintaining these results over time is rare. In fact, most people gain the weight back after their diet ends.

Now, weight loss is not everyone's goal, nor should it be. The number on the scale is not actually the best measure of how healthy you are, and the restrictions we make while dieting can leave us without enough of the essential nutrients that keep our bodies working as they should.

Another limitation of fad diets is the one-size-fits-all approach. They often overlook individual differences in nutritional needs and health conditions. Each of us is unique, and what works for one person may not necessarily be suitable for another. It's important to tailor our dietary choices to our own bodies and health circumstances. Plus, most of the claims made by fad diets are often not supported by scientific evidence. Beware of promises that sound too good to be true.

Beyond the physical effects, strict adherence to fad diets can also take a toll on our mental and emotional health. Rigid rules and restrictions can lead to increased stress, social isolation and an unhealthy relationship with food. A balanced mindset around eating helps us avoid feelings of guilt and anxiety.

Instead of focusing on what you can't have, shift your attention to what you can. Whole foods like fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains and healthy fats provide a wide range of nutrients essential for overall health and well-being. Maintaining a *balanced* approach to eating means enjoying a variety of foods in appropriate amounts.

Here are three key tips for a balanced diet:

1. **Embrace variety.** Eat different types of foods from each food group to give your body the nutrients it needs. A simple way to do this is to aim for a variety of colors on your plate throughout the day.
2. **Listen to your body.** Notice when you're hungry, and when you're full. That way, you can eat when you need to and stop when you feel satisfied. Paying attention to these signals can help you prevent mindless eating.
3. **Practice moderation, not deprivation.** It's okay to indulge in your favorite foods, just keep it balanced. If you restrict yourself too much, it can backfire and make it harder to stick to a plan.

If you're unsure about the best approach for your needs, consider seeking guidance from a registered dietitian or health care professional. They can provide personalized advice based on sound scientific evidence, helping you create a healthy eating plan that works for you.

Remember, healthy eating is about nourishing your body while enjoying the foods you love. It doesn't have to be complicated or restrictive. By adopting a balanced and sustainable approach to nutrition, you can achieve long-lasting health.

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