

What is a Fad Diet?

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Fad diets make promises that sound too good to be true (and usually are). Americans spend billions of dollars every year on these diets. Most of the weight lost is usually regained, some people even have serious health consequences. Listed below are some characteristics of a fad diet. If you are considering a diet that makes one or more of these claims you should consult your physician or registered dietitian for advice before beginning the diet.

Characteristics of a Fad Diet

- Promotes quick weight loss of more than 1 to 2 pounds per week.
- Suggests that weight can be lost or maintained without exercise or lifestyle changes.
- Restricts or eliminates foods that are supposed to “cause” weight gain.
- Fails to mention portion control
- Does not follow the US Dietary Guidelines or Food Guide Pyramid
- Is not based on scientific evidence
- Is deficient in major nutrients such fiber, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals.
- Encourages the dieter to eat as much of a certain food as he or she wants, and also recommends a daily caloric intake that is below the requirements for healthy adults.
- Encourages consumption of a high protein, high fat foods while significantly restricting carbohydrate.

High Protein Diets

Some of the most popular fad diets today are high protein diets (also called “low carb diets”). These diets can become unhealthy over time.

- High protein diets (also called low carb diets) are usually also high in fat and cholesterol. These diets exclude or significantly limit almost all fruits, vegetables and grains.
- Diets high in protein and fat are not recommended by major health organizations such as the American Heart Association, The American Dietetic Association, The Food and Drug Administration and the US Department of Agriculture, due to the lack of evidence supporting the claimed benefits of the diet.

The Major Risks Associated with “Low Carb” Diets

Heart Disease – a low fiber diet that is high in animal protein, cholesterol and saturated fat is proven to raise serum cholesterol. Eliminating carbohydrate and fiber from the diet increases the risk of developing heart disease. A diet high in animal protein may also increase homocysteine and iron levels in the body, both of which increase the risk of heart disease.

Cancer – the risk for many types of cancer increases when consumption of fruits, vegetables and whole grains is decreased. The National Cancer Institute recommends a high fiber, low fat diet.

Osteoporosis - may occur when a diet high in animal protein is consumed. High amounts of calcium are lost in the urine which can contribute to osteoporosis.

Kidney Stones - both uric acid and calcium oxalate stones are likely to occur in individuals on high protein or ketogenic diets.

Dizzy Spells/Fainting - also known as orthostatic hypotension. This is a rapid drop in blood pressure that occurs because of a loss of fluids and electrolytes. It usually occurs when individuals go from sitting to standing too quickly.

Weight Control - long term weight loss is not maintained on most fad diets. These diets are limited in the type and variety of food suggested. Individuals usually become bored and find themselves bingeing or sliding back in to old food habits.

Fruity Breath – also known as keto breath. Some people say they smell nail polish or over ripe pineapple. This smell is common in diabetics when their bodies enter ketosis*.

The bottom line with low carb diets is that carbohydrate intake does not increase appetite and promote weight gain. Excess calorie intake (regardless of the source) is the major contributing factor in weight gain. When it comes to weight loss there is no “quick fix”. Rather than dieting, consider making lifestyle changes that will give you healthier overall eating habits. Focus on the Food Guide Pyramid, portion control, exercise and common sense.

More information on the Food Guide Pyramid and serving size suggestions can be found on The Food and Nutrition Information Center’s Website @ <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/etext/fnic.html>

* Ketosis is **NOT** a normal state for the body. It may cause dehydration, dizziness, constipation, weakness, irritability, bad breath and headaches. Ketosis is the body’s response to starvation. It is a last ditch emergency response. Ketosis can be fatal in people with diabetes and during pregnancy it can cause abnormal fetal development (and even death).