

Popular diets often promise quick, dramatic results, but they are generally ineffective for long-term weight management. Any weight lost is usually regained shortly after the plan ends. Popular diets can also be extremely hazardous to your health. Numerous physical complications, including kidney stones, gall bladder problems, and even death, have been associated with popular diets.

What Are Some Examples of Popular Diets?

Very Low Carbohydrate Diets

Very low carbohydrate diets are usually high in animal protein and fat, and usually low in fiber, whole grains, vegetables, fruit, and the disease-fighting phytochemicals they provide. These diets produce rapid weight loss due to excess water elimination, not from a loss in body fat. Potential health hazards of very low carbohydrate diets include dehydration, fatigue, blood electrolyte imbalances, gout, calcium loss from bone (if excessive protein is consumed), and heart disease (if excessive saturated fat is consumed).

Pre-packaged Foods and Drinks

Diet plans which mandate the use of pre-packaged foods or drinks do not emphasize the importance of making permanent lifestyle changes. These diets fail to teach proper cooking techniques, menu selections, and food purchasing guidelines. As a result, the weight lost during the use of these plans is often easily regained once you start eating normal foods again.

Usually these diets do not supply adequate amounts of protein, fiber, or phytochemicals. In addition, they are often very low in calories, which results in a greater drop in basal metabolic rate (and increases the risk of weight regain) than more moderate plans. These plans are also generally costly and not effective in long-term weight management.

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Diuretics

Water pills, or diuretics, do nothing to solve a weight problem. Loss of a few pounds of water lasts only for a half a day. Use of diuretics can also cause severe dehydration and blood electrolyte imbalances.

Diet Pills

The effect of phenylpropanolamine (or PPA), the active ingredient in over-the-counter diet pills, closely resembles that of amphetamines. These drugs reduce your appetite on a temporary basis, often only for a week or two, and they can be addictive. Studies show they do little to enhance the rate of weight loss.

Dietary Supplements

Several dietary supplements containing vitamins, minerals, herbs, enzymes, and other compounds are sold for weight loss. These products claim to burn fat and boost metabolism, but most are just a waste of money and some can have serious side effects. For instance, Ma Huang, or Ephedra, contains ephedrine, a powerful stimulant that increases heart rate and blood pressure. Due to reports of stroke, seizures, heart disorders, psychotic episodes, and even death, products containing ephedrine were banned by the FDA (Food and Drug

Administration) in April of 2004. Another botanical stimulant now substituted for ephedrine in weight-loss products is “Bitter Orange” (Citrus Aurantium). Bitter Orange contains synephrine, which stimulates a rise in blood pressure, and both its safety and efficacy have yet to be determined. Keep in mind that unlike drugs, which are tightly regulated by the FDA, dietary supplements do not actually have to be proven to be effective or safe to be sold.

What Is an Effective, Healthy Way to Manage My Weight?

Regular physical activity, proper eating habits, and lifestyle changes are essential to a successful, long-term weight management program. The best way to safely and effectively lose weight, is to increase your caloric expenditure through exercise, and limit your caloric intake by avoiding excess fat and sugar in your diet and reducing serving sizes. These changes should slowly become a permanent part of your lifestyle.

To learn more about popular diets, please visit www.snac.ucla.edu.

PROBLEMS WITH POPULAR DIETS

Popular diets are often heavily promoted and can be very expensive. They work because you consume fewer calories—whether it's by cutting out carbohydrates, eating pre-packaged meals, or only drinking powdered milkshake formulas. The bottom line is that these diets give only temporary results, if any. Why?

- Quick weight loss, through appetite suppression or very low-calorie meal plans, often leads to the loss of more lean body mass and less body fat than more moderate weight loss plans.
- The body responds to very low-calorie diets by slowing down its metabolism (basal metabolic rate) to conserve energy.

Furthermore, without regular physical activity and lifestyle changes, your chances of regaining weight are high. Listed below are some other problems to consider regarding popular diets:

Physical Problems

- Increase in blood cholesterol levels and heart disease may result from intake of foods high in saturated fat, such as those allowed on many popular low carbohydrate diets.
- Dangerously low sodium and potassium levels in the blood may result from fasting, starvation, and diuretic or laxative use.
- Uncomfortable constipation may result from inadequate fiber intake on low carbohydrate and very low calorie diets or from laxative dependency.
- Extreme fatigue, immune suppression, and other health problems may occur with severe dehydration and malnutrition.

Psychological Problems

- People who repeatedly try popular diets often have distorted body images which can undermine self-esteem and self-confidence and lead to more extreme eating disorders.
- Popular diet plans do not promote long-term behavior changes, so dieters may experience feelings of failure when weight is regained.
- People on very restrictive diets often crave “forbidden foods,” leading to feelings of deprivation, depression, and a preoccupation with food. Eventually, this type of restriction leads to binge eating, followed by feelings of guilt and more depression.



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CHANGE YOUR APPROACH TO WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

For permanent weight management in a healthy and safe way, erase the dieting mentality from your mind, your attitude, and your life:

- **Relate to food as a fuel, not a comforting friend, nor a fattening enemy.** Food is your body's fuel! If you don't provide it with adequate fuel, it will not perform well.
- **Legalize all foods.** There is no such thing as "good" or "bad" foods, only good or bad diets. It is not what you eat once in a while, but what you eat every day that counts.

Try the following tips to stop dieting and start eating for permanent weight management:

- **Focus on health and fitness, not weight.** The number on the scale says nothing about your body composition (i.e., is it water, fat, bone, or muscle?) and is a poor indicator of your health and fitness status.
- **Listen to your body carefully.** Tune into your body's natural hunger signals (e.g., stomach pangs), and make a distinction between physiological hunger and emotional hunger.
- **Eat mindfully.** Pay attention to and enjoy every mouthful. Separate eating from other activities (like studying), so you can focus on hearing your body's physiological signals. Also, slow down. It takes about 20 minutes before your stomach tells your brain that you are physiologically full.
- **Graze, don't gorge.** Eat mini meals every four hours or whenever you are physically hungry. Start feeding yourself on demand, instead of on your dieting schedule. When we learn to trust that food will always be there, we begin to feel more secure in general, and we are less likely to overeat.
- **Plan ahead.** Take time to plan nourishing meals and snacks.
- **Take a fresh look at nutrition.** Enjoy plenty of fresh, whole foods: vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lowfat dairy products, beans, nuts, lean meats, poultry, and fish.
- **Read all about it.** Carefully digest the details on food packages and labels so you can get the best nutrition and health buys for your money.
- **Change the "E" word from "exercise" to "enjoyment."** Choose physical activities that you love and want to do. Enjoy moving your body. You'll be burning calories while feeling better and having fun!