



FAD DIETS, Weight Loss And Your Health. Is It Really Worth It?

By Tricia Talerico, D.C., MS, Nutr.



Yes, it's almost swimsuit season and most of us dread this time of year. For Nutritionists and Functional Medicine Docs, it's actually the worst time of year. This is the season (also January) when we see lots of people doing crazy, desperate things to lose weight. Of course, I am a fan of all of us being as lean as possible, loving the way we look and living a long, healthy life. However, a big part of my nutrition practice sees men and women who have done some silly fad diets and then cannot figure out why they have re-gained their original weight lost, feel sluggish and tired and then gain additional weight when the "diet" is over. We all want to look good in our skinny jeans (if you own a pair), bathing suits or speedos, but at what cost?

So, let's look carefully at some of the short and long-term effects of fad dieting, shall we?

1. *You will lose weight...temporarily. Most of these fad diets work because they adjust your total caloric, so you will lose weight. The problem is that this process usually slows down your metabolism or even halts it.*

2. *Prolonged hunger as a result of reduced caloric intake*

3. *Depression, irritability*

4. *Reduced sex drive*

5. *Fatigue, fainting, weakness*

6. *Muscle and hair loss*

7. *Loose folds of skin*

8. *Dehydration*

9. *Constipation*

10. *Nausea and headaches*

11. *Inadequate vitamin and mineral intake (especially sodium, potassium, magnesium and copper). According to cardiologist, Isadore Rosenfeld, M.D., professor of clinical medicine at Weill Cornell Medical College, N.Y., crash diets (consisting of less than 1200 calories a day), especially if done more than once, can increase your risk of heart attacks. Linda Bacon, Ph.D. and California-based nutritionist says that long-term low calorie dieting/eating can eventually lead to heart muscle loss and damage to blood vessels. Shrinking and expanding the body can cause micro-tears in the blood vessels, a perfect set-up for atherosclerosis and inflammation.*

Some of the more popular fad diets include the cabbage soup diet, raw food diet, werewolf or lunar diet, cookie diet, five-bite diet, master cleanse/lemonade diet, baby food diet, grapefruit diet, cotton ball diet and the HCG diet. The list is really endless and all of us could probably add a few more to it.

So, what's the answer to fad diet weight loss? The answer is a balanced eating plan combined with portion control and that's nothing new. Combine this with moderate physical activity and it's a "win-win" plan. What shall we include in this eating plan?

1. *Lots of veggies - cooked and raw*

2. *Drink plenty of water.*

3. *Limit saturated fat and include more monounsaturated fats in your life (olives, coconut, nuts/seeds, avocado and nut butters).*

4. *Include lean meat, fish, poultry or alternatives (preferably organic or grass fed).*

5. *Limit sugar-sweetened beverages and alcohol (if you choose to drink).*

6. *Limit grains such as cereals, breads, rice, pastas. When choosing them always go for the gluten-free version and limit your serving size! I am a huge fan of gluten free living!*

Our bodies need a good, healthy balance of carbohydrates, proteins and fats. Carbohydrates provide our bodies with energy or fuel. They are also rich in fiber, vitamins and minerals. Proteins are needed to make, maintain and renew all human tissue and cells. Proteins can be found in animal and plant-based foods. I am also a huge fan of high quality protein shakes as an excellent way to ensure we get adequate protein. Fats are needed to protect our organs, keep us warm, produce hormones and absorb nutrients.

So, be active or exercise every day, in other words, get off the couch! Make small, achievable lifelong changes to your diet and lifestyle. If you need help figuring out what this looks like, enlist the help of a qualified clinical nutritionist or functional medicine doc. Most importantly, being healthy includes feeling good about yourself. Don't accept the unrealistic body images portrayed in the media and know that as long as we continue to make healthy lifestyle changes, we are always winning.

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