

Diet Traps that Keep You from Losing

With all the diets out there to choose from these days, it's hard to know which ones are legitimate and which are diet fads.

To help you gain clarity, here are some common diet traps from the Weight-control Information Network (WIN), part of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases.

Myth: Fad diets will take the weight off and keep it off.

Facts: Fad diets that drastically limit calories or ban food groups may help you lose weight, but it's hard to stick with these diets over the long term. Diets that are very limiting are hard to follow; many people get bored with these kinds of diets and end up regaining the weight they lost.

Fad diets also may be unhealthy, because they may not provide all the nutrients your body needs, the WIN says. If you lose more than three pounds a week on a diet, you may increase your risk for developing gallstones. Extremely low-calorie diets may lead to problems with heart rhythm.

The fix: The best way to lose weight and keep it off is to aim for half a pound to two pounds a week. You can accomplish this by choosing healthy foods, watching your portions, and adding daily exercise.

Myth: Low-carb diets are a healthy way to lose weight.

Fact: Low-carbohydrate, high-protein diets are not balanced eating plans, the WIN says. On these kinds of diets, you may be eating too much fat and cholesterol, which may boost your risk for heart disease. You also may get too few fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Eating fewer than 130 grams of carbohydrates a day can lead to a buildup of a kind of partially broken down fats called ketones. This can lead to gout and kidney stones. High levels of ketones in the blood are also accompanied by undesirable side effects such as nausea, headaches, fatigue, and bad breath.

The fix: Instead of cutting back on carbohydrates, you should reduce your overall caloric intake. A healthy reducing diet includes carbohydrates, protein, and fat. This kind of diet usually is easier to follow, because it offers a wider variety of foods.

Myth: When you're trying to lose weight, you don't need to pay attention to the beverages you drink.

Fact: It's easy to guzzle more than you think because liquid calories – from fruit and coffee drinks to beer and regular soda – don't yield much satiety, meaning psychologically you don't feel like you've eaten.

The fix: Curb liquid calories by making everything you drink between meals low-calorie or calorie-free. Drink water, seltzer, regular coffee, tea, diet soda, diet V-8 Splash, or Crystal Light. Also, make specialty coffee drinks a splurge rather than an everyday event.

Myth: What you do while you eat isn't important.

Fact: Eating while you're doing something else, whether it's driving, watching TV, or answering e-mail, is a good way to inhale calories without realizing it because on-the-go calories can be dissatisfying.

The fix: Schedule at least 20 minutes for eating without the television on and without reading, which also can be distracting. Your aim is to focus on your food and savor every bite.

Myth: Starches are fattening, so you should limit them if you need to lose weight.

Fact: Foods high in starch include bread, rice, pasta, cereal, beans, fruits, and some vegetables. These foods are also low in fat and calories. They become high-fat and high-calorie when you add butter, sour cream, or mayonnaise, the WIN says.

The fix: The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that you have three to 10 servings of bread, cereal, rice, and pasta each day, even when you are trying to lose weight. Try to choose whole grains and watch your serving size: one serving is 1 slice of bread, 1 ounce of ready-to-eat cereal, or a half-cup of pasta, rice or cooked cereal, the WIN says.

Myth: Diets based on a specific food burn fat, helping you lose weight.

Fact: No foods "burn" fat, the WFN says. Foods that contain caffeine may speed up your metabolism, but they don't make you lose weight.

The fix: To lose weight, you need to reduce the number of calories you eat and add exercise to your daily activities.

Information courtesy of UnitedHealthcare and StayWell.