



Nutri-Facts

Issue #7

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Greetings all!

Although many adults recognize the importance of a healthy weight, many are using weight loss methods that are not in agreement with current nutrition or physical activity recommendations. An estimated 20% of adults turn to fad diets to lose those unwanted pounds.

For agents, there is an information sheet that discusses reasons why fad diets are used along with their potential health consequences. I have also prepared a two-page fact sheet for consumers to help them identify fad diets. Finally, there is a brief news-release that can be used in your local paper.

Note: Since this issue was first released, an educational program with the same title has been developed and is available via the Extension library. The program includes color overheads, a script and a handout that can be reproduced and given to clientele.

As always, I am open to ideas and suggestions for future issues.

Eat Well!

Jenna

Agent Information Sheet, Nutri-Facts #7

How are these foods related: a head of cabbage, a 4-pound bag of sugar, and a grapefruit? They all have popular diets named after them.

What is a fad diet?

A fad diet is a popular "crash" diet that is designed for quick weight loss. In **most** cases, fad diets are not supervised by a doctor or registered dietitian.

Fad diets are popular because they appeal to individuals who want immediate weight loss, who want an easy way to lose weight, and who want to lose a lot of weight in a short period of time. This is what many fad diets promise.

The Dark Side of Fad Diets

Despite some claims that they can help you "lose 30 pounds in 30 days," fad diets have little, if any, long-term success. They tend to be too boring or restrictive to follow for a significant period of time. In addition, such diets often fail to promote long-term (i.e. permanent) healthful changes in one's eating and physical activity behaviors. As a result, most people who lose weight on fad diets regain the weight as soon as they go back to their old eating and physical activity habits.

Some fad diets are linked to potential health risks:

1. People who lose a lot of weight in a short period of time risk losing lean body tissue (i.e. muscle). Muscle helps control our metabolism. When we lose muscle, we often lower our metabolism. This is one reason why most people regain their lost weight when they go off of a diet.
2. Gastrointestinal (GI) problems. Diets high in protein or fat and low in carbohydrate usually lack dietary fiber. A lack of fiber increases the risk for developing constipation. On the other hand, eating large amounts of cabbage soup several times a day may result in excess flatulence (i.e. intestinal gas). Individuals who follow diets that are lacking in fruits and vegetables are missing out on some important phytochemicals that may promote health and prevent disease.
3. Inadequate intake of nutrients. Some fad diets lack one or more essential nutrients, especially those that either eliminate specific food groups or require large amounts of one specific food. A nutritious diet should not require large amounts of vitamin and mineral supplements.
4. Increased risk of osteoporosis. Diets low in calcium (the majority of adult women don't consume enough calcium) combined with high intakes of animal protein **may** increase the rate at which calcium is lost from the bone. Remember, our bones are about as strong as they will be by the age of 30!

Need help spotting a fad diet? Give it the "WOW" test.

Read some of the claims used to advertise a weight-loss diet. Popular claims include:

"Easy" "Miraculous" "Exclusive" "Amazing"

If the claims on a weight-loss diet cause a person to say "wow," it's probably a fad diet.

Other Signs of a Fad Diet

Fad diets aren't usually labeled as such. However, there are some ways to identify diets which are more likely based on fiction than fact. For additional information, check out the consumer fact sheet.

If a diet:

1. promotes fat-burning foods,
2. promises rapid weight loss,
3. claims one can lose weight without exercising,
4. includes large amounts of one specific foods,
5. uses the results of a single study to prove its success,
6. promotes strict menus and specific times to eat,
7. includes the use of supplements or special products,
8. promotes changing eating habits for just a short period of time,
9. labels foods as either "good" or "bad,"
10. does not include a warning for persons with chronic disease to check with their doctor before starting any weight loss diet, **then it's probably a fad diet!**

Healthful alternatives to fad diets

It is hard to compete with fad diets that promise rapid weight loss in just a few weeks, despite the fact that most nutrition experts recommend a rate of weight loss that is no more than 2 pounds per week. Yet those extra pounds didn't come on overnight. So why should we expect them to leave immediately? People who want long-term success with weight loss should consider adopting the concept of "weight management." With this concept, obesity and overweight are chronic diseases; therefore, they are treated for life. This means consumers have to adopt realistic weight goals and embrace healthful eating (i.e. the Dietary Guidelines) and physical activity habits **FOR LIFE**. As noted in the **2005 edition of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans**, to reduce the risk of chronic disease in adulthood, **30 minutes** of moderate-intensity physical activity on most days of the week is recommended. This is in addition to usual activities at home or work. To help manage body weight and prevent gradual, unhealthy body weight gain in adulthood, **60 minutes** of moderate to vigorous intense activity is needed on most days of the week. To sustain weight loss in adulthood, the recommended amount of physical activity is **60 to 90 minutes** on most days of the week. This is in addition to consuming a healthy diet that has is not excessive in calories.

What about the low-carbohydrate diets?

In the past, low-carb diets have been dismissed as another fad diet because of the potential for adverse health effects in part because we had no evidence that low-card diets worked. In the last few years, some research has been conducted on these diets with interesting results:

- In the **short term (i.e. 6 months)**, low-carbohydrate diets **may** promote a faster rate of weight loss compared to other types of diets. However, at the end of 1 year, the amount of weight lost on low-carb diets is similar to that of other diets.
- For **some** individuals, low-carbohydrate diets **may promote** improved blood lipids. Whether improved blood lipids is due to the diet or the weight loss is not known. We also don't know whether this change is sustained over the long term.
- Dropout rates are high for both low-fat and low-carbohydrate diets. This goes back to what many experts believe - diets don't work! We have to think about permanent changes in our eating and physical activity habits.
- The long-term effects of low-carbohydrate diets are unknown. There is the concern about increase risk of heart disease and cancer when a diet void of fruits and vegetables is followed.
- More research (short and long-term) is needed.

Organizations including the American Heart Association, the American Dietetic Association and the American Medical Association are not recommending low-carbohydrate diets for general populations. Low-carbohydrate diets are also not recommended by Texas Cooperative Extension. However, if individuals choose to follow a low-carbohydrate diet, they should consult their physician before and during diet implementation.

Are there any diets that work?

In January 2005, a study that evaluated the efficacy of major commercial weight loss programs was published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. This study reviewed several programs including eDiets.com, Take Off Pounds Sensibly (TOPS), Optifast, Health Management Resources, and Weight Watchers. A MedLine search was also conducted to review studies that evaluated their effectiveness. Other diet programs such as Jenny Craig were described in the study as well. Based on the evaluation of existing studies, the authors concluded that there is really very little evidence to support the use of the major commercial and self-help weight loss programs. Weight Watchers was the only identified commercial weight loss program whose efficacy has been demonstrated, although the authors noted that the cost of the program may be a barrier for many individuals. Support groups like TOPS and Overeaters Anonymous are important but lack research to demonstrate their effectiveness. There is also not enough evidence to recommend commercial diet programs that are Internet based.

For more information about fad diets, check out the following web sites:

The Wheat Foods Council at <http://www.wheatfoods.org>.

The Wheat Foods Council has also published a new book on healthful weight management titled *Eating Well, Living Well: When You Can't Diet Anymore*, by Glenn Gaesser, Ph.D., and Karin Kratina, M.A., R.D. Look for it on Wheat Foods Council web site.

The American Dietetic Association at <http://www.eatright.org> (Click onto Healthy Lifestyle)

The American Heart Association at <http://www.americanheart.org>

At the bottom of the home page, click on "search." Then, type in the words fad diet. There are several articles and fact sheets on this subject.

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2005 edition. Accessed 2/25/05 at <http://www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/>

Additional References

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Stern L, Iqbal N, Seshadri P, Chicano KL, Daily DA, McGrory J, Williams M, Gracely EJ, Samaha FF. The effects of low-carbohydrate versus conventional weight loss diets in severely obese adults: one-year follow-up of a randomized trial. *Annals of Internal Medicine*. 2004; 140:778-785.

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Weight Loss Diets: Separating Fad from Fact

Some people will try almost any diet if there is a glimmer of hope that it will help them reach the proverbial, but often unrealistic, "ideal" weight. Many of these diets are often advertised with claims like "lose weight overnight" or "proven to work." But how does a person know if a weight loss diet is truth or fiction? If you are thinking about trying a diet that has one or more of these characteristics, you might want to think about other safe and healthful approaches to weight management.

Fad: Diets that promote fat-burning foods.

Fact: No food has been shown to melt away body fat. In fact, if a person eats more than the body needs, the body uses the excess energy to make fat.



Fad: Diets that promise rapid weight loss

(**Exception:** medically supervised weight-loss programs)

Fact: At the beginning, most of the weight lost on these diets is water. After that, if one is losing more than 2 pounds per week, the chances are pretty good that some of that weight is muscle. Losing muscle lowers the body's metabolism and will likely lead to weight gain once the diet is stopped.



Fad: Diets that claim you can lose weight without exercising.

Fact: Successful weight management requires a nutritious diet that and physical activity. To prevent weight gain in adulthood, 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous intensity activity is recommended on most days of the week. This is in addition to a diet that



contains an enough calories - but not too many!

Fad: Diets that include large amounts of a specific food.

Fact: These diets are boring and often lack one or more important nutrients. In addition, following these diets may lead to some unpleasant side effects including bloating and intestinal gas.



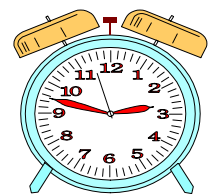
Fad: Diets that use the results of a single study to prove its success.

Fact: One study is not enough to conclude the success of a weight loss diet.



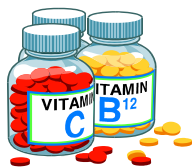
Fad: Diets that promote strict menus and specific times to eat.

Fact: Such diets don't take into account the taste preferences of Americans. Plus, these diets are usually so strict that they are too difficult to follow for any length of time, leading to disappointment when weight loss doesn't occur or is not maintained.



Fad: Diets that include excessive dietary supplements.

Fact: Most likely, the only weight you will lose here is in your wallet. Vitamin or mineral supplements are usually not needed unless one is eating fewer than 1200-1500 calories a day. If you are following diets that are very low in calories, you should be under the care of a registered dietitian or physician to make sure that your nutrient needs are being met.



Fad: A diet that promotes changing your eating habits for just a short period of time.

Fact: These types of diets don't lead to long-term weight management or healthful eating habits. Any weight that is lost is probably water weight, so regaining that lost weight is very likely.



Fad: Diets that label foods as "good" or "bad."



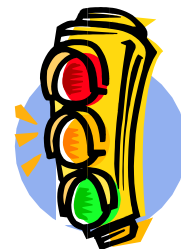
Successful weight management requires a reduction in calorie (or energy) intake **and** an increase in physical activity. Choose an eating plan that has the right amount of calories for your needs. Be sure to include plenty of whole grains, fruits and vegetables in your diet and try to be physically active for at least 60 minutes each day. Remember, all foods can fit - the key is to exercise moderation and portion control.

For more information about healthful weight management, contact your County Extension Agent or Registered Dietitian.

Developed by Jenna Anding, Ph.D., R.D., Extension nutrition specialist, July, 2000. Revised February 2005 Educational programs of Texas Cooperative Extension are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.

Fact: Healthful eating for successful weight management means **all** foods can fit on the plate. Forbidding specific foods or food groups (such as carbohydrates) is unhealthy, unrealistic, and may lead to bingeing or cheating (and more disappointment).

Fad: Diets that do not include a warning for persons with chronic diseases (like diabetes or hypertension) to check with their doctor before starting any weight loss diet.



Fact: According to the American Heart Association, some fad diets can raise blood pressure or blood sugar, even if weight is lost. Diets that are high in fat may lead to heart disease and cancer. In addition, high protein diets can strain the kidneys or liver in persons with kidney or liver disease. Children, teens, pregnant women and adults 65 years and older should not try to lose weight unless they are under the care of a physician.

News-release
March, 2005

The cover of a popular magazine advertises a diet that guarantees a 10-pound weight loss in 5 days. A diet book claims that eating specific foods will burn unwanted body fat while we sleep. Do these diets really work? "Don't bet on it," says Jenna Anding, Ph.D., R.D., an assistant professor and nutrition specialist with Texas Cooperative Extension. Yet such unrealistic claims haven't slowed down the \$33 billion dollars spent annually on fad diets and other weight-loss products. One in five adults have tried at least one fad diet this year alone.

Why are these diets so popular? "Fad diets often claim that they can help people lose weight immediately and easily," notes Anding. "This appeals to many people who want to lose weight. Unfortunately, these diets fail to deliver when it comes to long-term weight management. They tend to be so restrictive or unrealistic that the average person can't following them for long periods of time. As a result, there is disappointment when the promised weight loss doesn't occur or the lost weight returns." In addition, some fad diets produce unpleasant side effects. For example, diets that are extremely low in carbohydrate often lack dietary fiber, resulting in constipation. On the other hand, a diet that recommends eating large quantities of cabbage soup may cause increased intestinal gas. More seriously, some fad diets may raise blood cholesterol levels, increasing one's risk for developing heart disease, even if some weight is lost.

With advertisements like "guaranteed" and "proven to work," how can smart consumers separate the fad from fact? Anding suggests that if a diet has one or more of these characteristics, it's probably a fad diet:

- promotes fat-burning foods
- encourage the use of supplements or special products
- recommends changing eating behaviors for just a few days
- labels foods as either "good" or bad"
- suggests that one can lose weight and keep it off without exercising
- does not include a warning for persons with chronic diseases to check with their doctor before starting any weight-loss diet

In place of fad diets, Anding offers several approaches to healthful weight management. First, she recommends that individuals set realistic goals. "Remember, those unwanted pounds didn't appear overnight. Don't expect them to leave immediately," she cautions. Chose a diet that reflects the Dietary Guidelines and try to engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day. "Adopting these habits will not only help you reach a healthy weight, but it can also reduce your risk of developing other chronic diseases including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer." Individuals should check with their health care provider before starting any weight-loss or physical activity program, especially if they are sedentary, over the age of 40, or have a history of chronic disease.

To learn more about spotting fad diets as well as healthful approaches to weight management, contact _____, county Extension agent.