

The Skinny on Fad Diets

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What is a fad diet? It is a diet that receives a lot of enthusiasm as well as one that quickly comes and goes with something new to replace it.

Fad diets are not a new phenomenon with the first one believed to be in a booklet by

William Banting in 1863. Fad diets can also be recycled, reappearing years later and being touted as the newest and greatest thing. For example, the Master Cleanse first appeared in 1941 and encouraged people to drink a mixture of lemon or lime juice, maple syrup, water and cayenne pepper six times per day for at least 10 days as an aid for weight loss. This fad diet resurfaced in 2006 when Beyoncé claimed it was the secret to her recent weight loss.

We are constantly bombarded with messages promoting this type of diet. For example, waiting in line at the store and you will see an array of magazines touting the latest and greatest in nutrition. As you watch TV, you will be exposed to commercials for everything from meal plans and dietary supplements with claims of weight loss and better health. It can be easy to become caught up in the advertised claims. But are fad diets actually beneficial and healthy to follow?



How to spot a fad diet

With it being the first of the year and people pursuing their New Year resolutions, you will encounter more fad diets than before that advertise weight loss, changing eating habits and other health-related goals. Here are nine telltale signs to help you spot a fad diet:

- Endorses a short-term quick fix.
- Promises rapid weight loss.
- Promotes a certain food or type of food as being a miracle food.
- Villainizes certain foods or food groups.
- Eliminates foods or food groups from your diet.
- Has strict rules that must be followed.
- Requires you to buy products like meal replacement shakes or bars or dietary supplements.



- Includes a list of “testimonials.”
- Lacks scientific evidence to support the diet or is disproved by reputable scientific organizations.

What to do instead

Do not fall for fad diets because they promote what is often difficult to maintain for the long run. If you are looking to change your eating habits, here is a simple three-step plan to help you take control of your health goals this year:

1. Change how you refer to the word “diet.” This word gives the connotation that there is a starting and stopping point, which is the case with many fad diets because they can be too difficult or unrealistic to follow. Instead, think of a diet as a lifestyle change that encourages healthy habits that can be maintained over time.
2. Understand what is healthy and nutritious. For example, it is unrealistic to avoid all carbohydrates. Carbs provide a good source of energy for the body as well as vitamins, minerals and fiber. Instead, focus on choosing whole-grain versions of carbohydrates packed with fiber, like whole wheat bread, and reducing processed carbs like potato chips and cookies from your diet.

3. Focus on a balanced diet that promotes overall good health. Including plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds is ideal. Choose lean protein and low-fat dairy, and avoid excessive added sugar. Creating a healthy diet will help you achieve your long-term health goals, whether that is having more energy or losing weight.

Keep in mind, however, that if weight loss is the goal, it should be slow and controlled. Losing one to two pounds a week is typically recommended because this rate of weight loss is easier to achieve and maintain. This can be done with changes in eating habits and physical activity. Diets that promote losing large amounts of weight in a short amount of time, such as fad diets, are hard to maintain, usually resulting in regaining the weight once the diet is no longer followed.

Remember, fad diets do not focus on lifestyle modifications, which are needed to keep the weight off, and are not sustainable throughout life. Focus on establishing a healthy diet that fits you and your goals.



Featured Recipe

Ground Chicken Chili

For complete recipe and nutrition facts: [Eating Well](#)

Preparation time: **25 minutes**

Total time: **45 minutes**

Servings: **6**



INGREDIENTS

- 2 tbsp** extra-virgin olive oil
- 1** large yellow onion, chopped
- 1** medium bell pepper, chopped
- 6** cloves garlic, minced
- 1 pound** ground chicken
- 2 tbsp** tomato paste
- 1 tbsp** chili powder
- 2 tsp** dried oregano
- 1 tsp** ground coriander
- ½ tsp** salt
- ½ tsp** ground pepper
- 2 (15 oz) cans** of no-salt-added cannellini beans, rinsed
- 1 (28 oz) can** of no-salt-added crushed tomatoes
- 2 cups** reduced-sodium chicken broth
- ¾ cup** shredded Cheddar cheese
- ¾ cup** plain whole-milk strained yogurt (like Greek yogurt)
- ¾ cup** thinly sliced scallions

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat** oil in a large pot on medium-high heat.
- 2. Add** onion, bell pepper and garlic. **Cook, stirring often**, until tender (about five minutes).
- 3. Add** ground chicken and cook, **stirring occasionally**, until the chicken crumbles and is no longer pink (about eight minutes).
- 4. Stir** in tomato paste, chili powder, oregano, coriander, salt and pepper. **Cook and stir** frequently until tomato paste caramelizes and spices are fragrant (about 1 minute).
- 5. Add** beans, tomatoes and broth. **Bring to a boil** over medium-high heat and then **reduce heat** to medium-low and **simmer, stirring occasionally**, until vegetables are softened (about 20 minutes).
- 6. Serve** chili topped with Cheddar cheese, plain Greek yogurt and scallions, if desired.

Nutritional Information:

Serving Size: ¼ cup

Calories: 206; Protein: 7g; Carbohydrates: 13g; Sugars: 4g

Fat: 16g; Saturated Fat: 3g; Sodium: 72mg

