



# MEG Fitness

*Create a New Future, Create a New You!*

## Let's Talk About Fad Diets

Although the big push for fad diets has died down a little bit, it is still estimated that at least two-thirds of Americans are on some type of diet at any given time. Although research shows the importance of eating from all the major food groups, people are still confused about what type of diet to follow, keeping the window open for more quacky solutions to pop up.

In an effort to help readers determine what makes a diet healthy and when it's time to steer clear, I am going to discuss what makes a diet a 'fad' diet and why these diets are something best to stay away from. Along the way, we will discover what each food group has to offer that can be beneficial to our health.

Our bodies are uniquely designed to take advantage of the proteins, carbohydrates and fats that we eat. In order for the liver to do the best job it can for us, we actually need all of these nutrients, known as macronutrients. Even a 'detoxifying' diet should also include all of these macronutrients!

During the past 20 years there has been a dramatic increase in obesity in the United States. Currently, more than 64% of US adults are either overweight or obese, according to results from the 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). So, look at the facts: Two thirds of all Americans are on some 'diet', yet we are getting fatter and fatter. Would that perhaps mean that the fad diets don't work? Let's talk about it.

### Identifying a fad diet

A 'fad diet' is defined as something temporary. Therefore, it's no surprise that these diets are not successful. Let's begin by looking at how to identify a fad diet.

#### #1 – Promises a fast weight loss.

This is great, in the short term, but how many readers have or know someone who has followed one of these diets, only to regain the weight back, plus more for added bonus? When people lose weight very quickly, they lose a lot of lean muscle tissue, and the weight that comes back will most likely be more fat and less muscle, making it easier and easier to regain weight each time they drop the last fad diet. A healthy diet to follow will be one that will encourage slow, progressive weight loss over a longer period of time. It will have enough calories to support vigorous exercise, so that you lose fat and not muscle. Diets that are too low for the body's basic needs will result in the body breaking down its protein stores (muscle) for the fuel it needs. Sort of defeats the whole purpose of the diet!

#### #2 – Eliminates foods or food groups.

The very first thing that alerts us that a diet is a 'fad' is when a particular food, or entire food group, is considered off-limits. This is a good time to talk about the low carb diets.

What is it that has made carbohydrates a *bad* nutrient? When you look at other countries, where the intake of carbohydrates is as high as 80%, and see that many of these countries are not suffering

even close to the obesity rates we are in America, you have to wonder why they are not having the same problem. So, can it really be the carbs? Probably not. But, maybe it's the type of carbs. Many people who decide to go on one of the popular low carbohydrate diets start to eliminate a lot of **food** from their diets, including all the snack foods they were eating, particularly at night. Gone are the chips, the cookies, the crackers, the ice cream. Gone are up to 300 to 1,000 calories per day! Anyone would lose weight if they cut out those many calories from their daily diet.

Another problem with eliminating entire food groups, especially on low carb diets, is that they are recommending eliminating or limiting the intake of nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables. With all the substantial research showing how beneficial these foods are to preventing various diseases, such as cancer and heart disease, it's amazing that anyone involved in healthcare would recommend such a diet. Something to also notice, however, is that none of these fad diet books are written by anyone with a degree in nutrition. Even the medical community is confused, which explains why physicians will fall for some of the hype fad diet authors write.

But let's talk a little more about fruits, vegetables and starches: A diet high in animal protein and animal fat has been linked to various disease and inflammation states. A diet very high in protein puts a great load on our kidneys and can contribute to constipation, gout and bone loss due to calcium depletion from the high protein load.

Combine that with decreased fiber from lack of whole grains and fiber-rich fruit and vegetables, and many people just don't feel well; they feel fatigued, sluggish and their immune system is depressed.

### **#3 – Starts with a shock or follows a strict plan.**

When the diet says you have to start with an extremely restricted diet, or you can only eat certain foods on particular days, you know it's a fad diet. They justify this by saying you have to clean out the body, or only certain foods will help with the weight loss process. Any change in how you currently eat will result in changes on the scale. Very few people can remain on these diets very long, so once they are 'off' the diet, the weight returns. The dieter learned nothing other than the misinformation the author provided them with. This can actually have far-reaching consequences, as then the dieter is more confused than ever and doesn't know what to believe!

Once a person learns what the qualities of a healthy diet consist of, they find that their optimum calorie level is for their own needs, and they are able to achieve their goals, combining their eating plan with exercise. Not only do they start to enjoy life again, but enjoy food AND see weight loss! Although fad diet authors want you to believe their 'miracle' (and buy their products), there really is no get-thin-quick solution that is permanent.

But what *does* constitute a healthy diet? A healthy diet is one that is adequate in calories to support healthy weight, low in animal fats and saturated fats, animal protein should be very lean and adequate enough to support a diet high in fruits and vegetables and whole grain starches. Any healthy diet can include foods that are just for enjoyment, however. All foods really do fit, in moderation. A general rule is an 80/20 rule: Eighty percent of the time the diet should be healthy and then 20% of the time it can include foods you would not eat on a regular basis if you were trying to eat for health and weight loss.

### **#3 – Contradicts what experts say.**

Authors of low carb diets say that the carbohydrates are what have made American's fat. But they can't explain why other countries whose diets are very high in carbohydrates don't have the same problems with obesity. You know it's a fad diet when the author says they have the 'inside' or

‘hidden’ truth about our health or diets. You also know it’s a questionable publication when they say there is a hidden agenda among health professionals or the government.

But why **is** America getting fatter and fatter? America is a country of grab-and-go: The faster, the better. Families seldom sit down to meals, together. There are fewer physical fitness programs in school and many of the school food choices are fast foods. People and entire families eat 2-3 of their daily meals from a drive-through or a restaurant, most of which provide very few of the foods high in nutrients and low in calories. Restaurants add extra fats to their dishes to enhance the taste, so a meal you could make at home without added fats could have up to 60% of it’s calories coming from fat to make it taste better! Plus, the serving sizes are much larger than they were 20 years ago, so most of the time the size of the meals could actually feed us for 2 to 3 meals, instead of one! However, many people still feel they must clean their plate rather than let the food ‘go to waste’. They really should say, “go to waist”!!

As you read this, think back to the last week. How often did you sit down at home and eat a home-cooked meal? Do you eat breakfast, lunch and dinner each day? How often do you exercise vigorously? In Europe, the meals are much smaller and people walk a great deal more than in America. In some neighborhoods, it’s actually impossible to walk to work, even if you live very close! Our road systems are no longer built for riding bikes or walking to work. You take your life into your hands, either from passing traffic or crime.

#### **#4 – Relies on testimonials rather than scientific research**

The fact that Jane lost pounds in a week because she just ate cabbage soup does not mean it’s safe, effective, or that it will work for you! What if you don’t LIKE cabbage?

An example of testimonials, combined with the research to back it up, is the National Weight Control Registry. In order to join the Registry, a person has to have lost pounds and have kept it off for a year. Currently consisting of over 4500 individuals, the Registry was founded in 1993 as a longitudinal prospective study. Currently, there have been six studies resulting out of the Registry. For more information on the Registry, along with how most of the Registry members have in common, here is the website: <http://www.nwcr.ws/>.

#### **#3 – Has a gimmick.**

The problem with diet plans that have some type of gimmick, is people can’t stay on them and they don’t learn how to eat for the long-term. It’s no secret that all the books must have something to ‘catch’ the reader. However, hidden among all the hype are books that really DO offer safe and effective solutions to weight loss. A book written by a registered dietitian (RD) is a guarantee that the material is accurate and safe. An RD is someone whose education, training and experience all revolve around the science and practice of nutrition; these truly ARE nutrition experts.

Consider this: If you had heart disease, you would see a cardiologist who specializes in heart health. If your teeth needed work, you would see a dentist. However, many people will buy ‘diet’ books from people who are not educated in nutrition! People will buy a diet book from a person who found what worked for them, or a movie star or a physician. In many of these books, because the author does not understand nutrition, many facts are distorted or misrepresented. It may not always be on purpose, but the point is these books are written by someone who really does not know

nutrition and the science behind it, so either they distort the facts, or they make them fit the gimmick they are trying to sell.

So, the next time a friend mentions this great new diet they're on, or you see a new book that offers 'miracle' weight loss or something that 'health professionals don't really want you to know', take a step back and ask yourself these questions:

- 1- Does it promise fast weight loss?
- 2- Does it eliminate any major foods or food groups?
- 3- Is there a strict plan that must be followed for success?
- 4- Does it contradict what nutrition experts and science has to say?
- 5- Does it rely primarily on testimonials and 'before and after' pictures too good to be true?
- 6- Is there a gimmick?

If you answered yes to all or most of these questions, after you have stepped back, walk away and find a better plan. Isn't today time to get real and make your weight loss plan permanent and realistic?

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