

Facts About Fad Diets



Iowa's Weight Battle

In 2003, Iowans spent \$783 million on health care related to obesity.

About 65 percent of Iowans are considered overweight or obese.

At any given time 29 percent of American men and 44 percent of American women are trying to lose weight.

It's no wonder Americans are tempted to try each and every new diet plan offered. Some of the promoted programs may even work—for awhile.

However, winning strategies for long-term success in weight management tend to be so simple anyone can afford to follow them.

The National Weight Control Registry asked 4,000 people who had lost at least 30 pounds—and kept it off at least a year—to list habits they had found helpful. Their recommendations included:

- eating breakfast;
- following a low-fat, high-carbohydrate diet;
- self-monitoring (weekly weigh-ins and daily food journals); and
- daily exercise.

Food Labels and Weight Control

Consumers can use the nutrition information on food labels for weight management. However, consumers need to be savvy; food labels also are used to market products.

Recent introductions of new low-carb products are an example. In an effort to increase sales, some food manufacturers are subtracting carbohydrates with a lower glycemic index from the total carbohydrates and referring to the result as “effective,” “net,” or “impact” carbs.

Low glycemic carbohydrates may have less affect on blood glucose level. Like all carbohydrates, however, they still contribute 4 calories.

The Food and Drug Administration does not recognize and has not defined any of the terms used on many low-carb products.

10 Characteristics of Fad Diets

1. **Sounds too good to be true.**
2. **Promises weight loss without exercise.**
3. **Promises weight loss of more than 1 or 2 pounds per week.**
4. **Discourages drinking water.**
5. **Food or food groups are excluded or consumed excessively.**
6. **Lists “good” and “bad” foods.**
7. **Uses these terms: “Fat Burner,” “Fat Blocker,” or “Boost Metabolism.”**
8. **Includes no warnings related to possible medical problems.**
9. **Requires purchase of pills, bars, shakes, or other foods.**
10. **Claims specific food combinations have weight loss powers.**

For additional resources, visit these Web sites

ISU Extension Answer Line www.extension.iastate.edu/answerline/
or call 1-800-262-3804

ISU Extension Nutrition www.extension.iastate.edu/nutrition

ISU Extension Publications www.extension.iastate.edu/pubs

Diet	Diet Composition	Claim	Pros	Cons
ZONE Diet®	40% carbohydrate 30% protein 30% fat	Appropriate combination of carbohydrate, protein, and fat at all meals leads to lower insulin levels. The body has increased energy and decreased hunger.	Nutritionally closer to widely accepted recommendations.	Difficult to use – diet composition must be followed at each meal and could contain up to 20 to 25% of total calories as saturated fat.
Atkins Diet®	No calorie restriction Initiation phase: 8% carbohydrate 36% protein 53% fat Maintenance: 31% carbohydrate 24% protein 40% fat	A low-carb diet is key to weight loss because carbs cause high insulin levels. High protein, high fat leads to decreased hunger. The body will burn fat while building muscle mass.		High intake of protein and fat can increase the risk of certain types of cancer. Lack of fiber, vegetables, and fruits can increase the risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer, diverticulosis, and constipation. Requires use of vitamin/mineral supplements.
South Beach Diet®	Restricted calories Phase 1: No carbohydrates Phase 2: Introduces “good” carbs (those with low glycemic index) Phase 3: Moderation diet	“Good” carbs stop insulin resistance, cure cravings, and promote weight loss.	Promotes healthier fats to protect the heart and prevent hunger. Phases 2 and 3 are relatively sound nutritionally.	Phase 1 promotes potentially dangerous weight loss and inadequate carbohydrate intake. Restricts carrots, bananas, pineapple, and watermelon.
Sugar Busters®	No calorie restriction 30% carbohydrate 30% protein 40% fat Food lists of acceptable and unacceptable foods based on glycemic index.	All sugars including complex carbohydrates and starches, are toxic because they produce excess insulin that causes our bodies to store sugars as fat and make cholesterol.	Encourages eliminating many of the “other” foods from the food guide pyramid (high sugar foods, snack foods, soda).	Eliminates too many healthy foods as part of its guidelines.
Good Carbs, Bad Carbs	Diet emphasizes consumption of low glycemic foods.	Changing from high glycemic foods “gushers” to low glycemic foods “tricklers” promotes weight loss.	Encourages consuming a variety of foods.	Some low glycemic foods are high fat (i.e. sponge cake, chips, chocolate bars). Dieters assume they can use “tricklers” and not gain weight.
The New Glucose Revolution®	Diet emphasizes consumption of low glycemic foods.	Foods with low glycemic index are more satisfying and promote burning body fat.	Encourages consuming a variety of foods.	The impact of glycemic index on heart disease and diabetes is greater than for weight loss. Benefits of limiting low-glycemic foods are unclear.

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