



THE HEART
AND STROKE
FOUNDATION
SOUTH AFRICA

Fad diets and healthy eating for weight loss

A fad/crash diet is a trendy weight-loss plan that promises dramatic results. There are hundreds of bad fad diets out there that promise to melt off the weight without effort. However, they all have one thing in common - they don't work and can be bad for your health.

So why is it that fad diets don't work? Most often these diets require radical changes to eating patterns which are not healthy, practical, or affordable in the long-term, which means they become unsustainable.

There's no magic secret that will cause you to burn dozens of kilos instantly. While fad diets can cause you to drop a lot of weight (often water weight) instantly, it'll come right back within a week or two.

Types of fad diets

1)Diets that focus on meal replacement shakes

Examples of these diets comprises low calorie meal replacement shakes and often include metabolism-boosting supplements.

They are expensive, may cause side effects, and the safety and effectiveness of the supplements hasn't been researched.

Diets that Focus on a few foods or food groups

Examples include the grapefruit diet, cabbage soup diet, extremely strict vegan and raw food diets, and low carb diets. Eating the same food or food groups limits the kind of nutrients your body needs.

Detox Diets

Examples of these diets are liquid only cleanses which replace solid foods. These diets have no grounding in science, and your liver and kidneys do an excellent job cleansing your body for you.

How crash diets harm your health

All crash diets end up harming your health and possibly even your heart. The message that crash dieting doesn't work and can be dangerous is a message that gets lost.

Firstly, research suggests rapid weight loss can slow your metabolism, leading to future weight gain, and deprive your body of essential nutrients.

Secondly crash diets can weaken your immune system and increase your risk of dehydration, heart palpitations, and cardiac stress. Long-term calorie-cutting can eventually lead to heart muscle loss and increase your risk of heart disease.

Shortages of potassium, magnesium, and copper have been suggested as possible causes of the arrhythmias (irregular heart beat) seen in crash dieters, and studies have also found that the diets can cause a drop in blood pressure and sodium depletion.

Healthy eating plan

Don't risk the dangers and failure of a bad fad diet that doesn't work. Start a weight loss eating plan that works.

Maintaining a healthy weight is one of the best things you can do to protect your health. Being overweight or obese increases your risk for having a heart attack or stroke. In fact, up to 80% of heart disease and stroke can be prevented by simply living a healthy lifestyle and that includes healthy eating.

Losing weight

Losing weight is not easy. This does not mean that successful weight loss and keeping the weight off is impossible. However, it is most likely when using a comprehensive approach that includes changing eating habits, increasing activity levels, and making changes to lifestyle habits that can be continued long term.

Simple steps to healthy eating

Enjoy your food but eat less

- It's good to enjoy food and share meals together but eating too much can lead to weight gain, increasing your risk for diabetes and heart disease.
- Reduce your portion sizes of fatty, starchy and sugary foods
- Portion with caution. Try to portion your plate according to the 'Plate Model' where:
 - $\frac{1}{2}$ of your plate consists of non-starchy vegetables such as broccoli, cabbage, tomatoes, cucumber, carrots
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate consists of high fibre starches such as brown rice, whole wheat pasta, sweet potato, butternut
 - $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate consists of lean protein such as grilled skinless chicken, fish, lean mince, ostrich meat, soya

Remember to always look out for the Heart Mark on foods to help you choose healthier options

Physical activity

Gradual and sustained weight loss is best achieved by combining a healthy eating pattern with regular physical activity. Aim for at least 150 minutes a week of moderate intensity physical activity - any activities that increases heart rate and breathing rate. If you are not currently exercising or very unfit then it is important to start slow and build up gradually as your fitness levels increase.

General weight loss tips

In addition to making healthy food choices and being more active, these tips can be helpful:

- Set a goal
- Create a regular eating routine on a daily basis
- Eat slowly and mindfully
- Plan ahead for meal
- Get support and encouragement from friends and family