

THE DIET FADS: A SHORT INTRODUCTION

If there is one thing that is easy to get when one is trying to eat healthy or lose weight, is advice. And what is even easier to find – whether we want to or not- is a plethora of diet trends pouring out of magazines, social media and gym instructors.

It's difficult not to become saturated with complicated information on food groups and to not be utterly lost with the ever-changing "latest" research about what *not* to eat. So, to make our collective lives as health-conscious foodies a little less hard, let's talk about the very basics of four of the most fashionable new diet trends.

THE PALEO DIET

The word Paleo must sound a little familiar. Yes, it traces back to "Paleolithic", which means The Stone Age. The Paleo diet focuses on eating what the primitive humans were eating more than thousands of years ago, before agricultural crops were a thing and we were hunter-gatherers. Yep. No supermarket aisles or deep freezers.



What did our ancestors eat when they weren't growing food or keeping livestock? Certainly not canned, processed foods or refined sugars. Their diets consisted of fruits, nuts, lean meat, eggs, seeds, fish and herbs. Their food did not consist of legumes, grains, beans, bread, rice, soft drinks, sugars or even dairy.

THE ATKINS DIET

First introduced in the 1970s, this is one of the oldest popular low-carb diet fads. The Atkins diet encourages the consumption of proteins and fats in large amounts for energy, and cuts down on carbohydrates. The diet quickly gained fame because of the fast and effective weight loss but was cracked down upon by health officials because it was high in saturated fat. However, the diet is being reconsidered by nutritionists and fitness trainers alike and has shown some positive health effects.

It is divided into four phases designed to induce quick fat loss and then maintain it while gradually introducing more carbs back into the diet. During the induction phase (phase 1) most starchy foods are eliminated but are added back during the maintenance phase. It is recommended however that we keep refined starches and sugars as well as trans fats (hydrogenated fats) at bay permanently.

THE KETOGENIC DIET

This diet is so popular, that it has managed to make its way into most restaurant menus. And why not? It encourages us to eat fats! One can finally have all the egg yolk and salad dressing one wants. So what's the catch? Very little carbs. Energy derived from carbs cannot be more than 10-20%; when our average diets give us around 50-60% of our energy from carbohydrates. It works by inducing Ketogenesis, which is a process in which our bodies break down fats instead of carbohydrates to provide us with energy. So the more we limit carbs, the more likely are we to burn fat.

While on Keto, one can liberally eat cheese, butter, oily nuts and green cruciferous vegetables but sugary foods, including root vegetables like potatoes, beets and even carrots have to be avoided.



INTERMITTENT FASTING

Intermittent Fasting is exactly what the name suggests: fasting intermittently. Most of us are familiar with fasting in one manner or another. We have skipped meals while on diets, or fasted for religious reasons; some of us routinely skip certain meals of the day. There are many versions of the Intermittent fasting diet, for example to 5:2, which is five days regular eating and 2 days fasting; the 16:8, eating for 8 hours of the day and fasting for the rest of the 16 hours; The Warrior Diet, which consists of only having one big dinner.

This is one of the easiest ways to go on a calorie deficit, provided we eat normally during our eating intervals. There is no actual restriction on what we can eat. But if during the eating intervals we end up eating so much that we make up for the fasting, or eating unhealthy, sugary or fatty foods, there is no real gain in health or fitness.

There are countless more, and more new ones keep pouring in. The key is to figure out what works best for you. The only way to be healthy and fit successfully is to find out what diet you can see as a potential lifestyle choice. Any diet plan which hinders your productivity, makes you lose muscle mass or leaves you feeling starved or fatigued is probably not for you and is likely to cause you more harm than good. One must remember that going on any diet plan that cuts out entire food groups can lead to nutrient deficiencies. It is always advisable to do some research yourself or see a qualified nutritionist before adopting any diet.