

Don't Lose to Lose

by Deanne Marselle, MA, RD, LD

As we begin to feel the warm weather of spring most of us realize that what has kept us warm during the winter months was not just the fluffy sweaters and heavy coats we wore, but perhaps a little extra insulation (fat) that has formed under our skin. This insulation doesn't look so good in shorts or a bathing suit. The anxiety of weight gain causes a quick fix reaction to shed pounds fast for many of us. But before you attempt to lose weight on the latest diet craze heed these words of warning. Be careful, because fad diets can be harmful to your health – and your wallet.

Fad diets began in the 1820s with the Vinegar and Water diet. Since then and up to the mid-1980s, new diets were introduced about every five years. Each fad diet tries to make its mark with a distinguishing feature. For instance, Horace Fletcher promotes “Fletcherizing” diet (1903) promising weight loss by chewing food 32 times before swallowing. The Cigarette Diet (1925) promoted “Reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet.” With the Hay Diet (1930) carbohydrates and proteins were not allowed at the same meal—in 1985 it was renamed the Fit for Life diet. And finally, with the Sleeping Beauty diet (1970) individuals were heavily sedated for several days.

And the newest diet craze...Starch Blockers! Starch blockers claim to decrease the amount of calories absorbed from starches by “neutralizing” the starches. Dieters simply take a supplement made from a natural substance derived from legume's (a starchy vegetable) that stops the starch digestion. Be wary, as undigested starches travel to the large intestine where the bacteria attempts to break them down, causing excessive bloating, gas, and even diarrhea. This diet concept was originally introduced in the 1980s, but the Food and Drug Administration suspended the sale of the Starch Blocker due to claims not supported by reliable scientific evidence. Yet, this diet aide and many other unnecessary dietary supplements remain on store shelves as the number of these products has outpaced federal regulations.

Fad diets often lack variety, omit essential nutrients needed for health, and label certain foods as bad or ones to avoid. Some fad diets attribute almost magical qualities to certain foods. A fad diet can be easily identified by common characteristics. Here are some questions to help you evaluate a diet you may be considering.

- Does the diet offer a quick fix?
- Does it sound too good to be true?
- Are foods classified as “good” and “bad” food?
- Are diet recommendations made to help sell a product?

Since 1986, American consumers have been bombarded with fad diets almost on a yearly basis. Many of us have probably heard and tried these fad diets of the past. This list contains only a small sampling of fad diets presented to the consumer.

- 1986 - **Rotation Diet**: Rotating number of calories taken in from week to week
- 1987 - **Scarsdale Diet**: Low-carbohydrate, low-calorie diet plan
- 1990 - **Cabbage Soup Diet**: Diet from the 1950s resurfaces on the web, flatulence is listed as the main side effect
- 1994 - **High Protein, Low Carb Diet**: Dr. Atkin's version
- 1995 - **Sugar Busters – Cut Sugar to Trim Fat**: Eliminates refined carbohydrates
- 1996 - **Eat Right for Your Type**: Diet based on blood type
- 1999 - **Juice, Fasting, and Detoxification**: Liquid supplements to clean the colon and skip meals (referred to as a Perennial diet)
- 2000 - **Raw Foods Diet**: Focuses on uncooked, unprocessed organic foods
- 2001 - **High Protein, Low Carb Diet**: 1994 diet updated
- 2004 - **Coconut Diet**: Fats are replaced with coconut oil
- 2005 - **Cheater's Diet**: Cheating on the weekend is required
- Sonoma Diet**: Mediterranean plant-based diet
- The Flavor Point Diet**: Works to subdue appetite
- The Supermarket Diet**: Very detailed meal planning
- The Longevity Diet**: Reduced-calorie diet claiming to slow the aging process
- 2006 - **Maple Syrup Diet**: Features a special syrup-lemon drink

- Does the diet and required supplements claim a “guaranteed cure”?
- Does the diet offer dire warnings about a food or product?
- Are statements made that contradict reputable health groups?
- Are the same recommendations made for everyone?
- Does the advertisement use non-scientific terms like “revitalize,” “detoxify” or “balance your body with nature”?
- What does your gut tell you (maybe you ought to ask this one first!)?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, keep looking for a better way to lose weight and improve your health.

Don't play “diet roulette” with your body by attempting to lose weight on a fad diet. Fad diets can be harmful to your health in the long run. The reality is there is no “super food” or diet approach to reverse weight gain from overeating and inactivity. Fad diets also do not teach new eating habits and many require you to give up your favorite foods. While fad diets might give short-term success, most people cannot maintain the plan over a long period of time.

The real key to success is about balancing the calories you consume with the calories you burn. For lifelong health, develop an eating plan that is rich in fruits, vegetables and whole-grains. In addition to these changes, try incorporating physical activity into your daily routine. Avoid the latest fad diet and focus on your overall health.