

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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“Diets: Is There Science Support”

Seventy percent of American adults are overweight and more than 35% are obese. So, people are looking for a safe, healthy and effective weight loss diet. Unfortunately, many turn to the internet for information or “misinformation.” For certain, diets come and go. Some trending diet plans are nothing more than fads with little scientific support. Let’s check out a few. Overall, a careful scientific analysis of both traditional and nontraditional diets shows that neither can guarantee long term weight loss. In short, most people who lose weight, after a while, tend to return to their same old diet and habits that caused their weight gain in the first place. For patients whose weight is addressed by their physicians, they tend to hear the tried-and-true mantra of “diet and exercise.” An analysis of the 2005–2010 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey was performed and it showed that physicians need to reaffirm that diet and exercise are better methods for weight loss. Investigators have now looked at over 250,000 men and women for up to 30 years, and we haven't seen that the percentage of calories from fat or from carbohydrates in our diets makes any difference in relation to heart attacks, various cancers or stroke. In terms of weight loss, the Dean Ornish low-fat diet (a brutal, miserable, total vegetarian regime) is no better than Dr. Atkins' low-carb (low-carb, high fat) program. In terms of weight loss, low-fat diets and low-carb diets overall are equally effective and usually neither will help you keep weight off long-term. Detox diets purport to work through “clean eating.” That typically means eating a strict diet of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and raw nuts and seeds, plus lots of water. But, there's no evidence detox and cleanse diets actually rid the body of toxins, or that they're necessary. Confusingly, a 2014 study found a low-carb diet produced greater weight loss than a low-fat diet. Additionally, a 2015 report found the Paleo (High protein) diet not only helped with weight loss, but it also improved cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, and other measures of metabolic syndrome. The Mediterranean diet, which is heavy in fruits, vegetables, fish, whole grains, and healthy unsaturated fats (olive oil), and low in processed foods, red meat, and saturated and trans fats, has confirmed health benefits by many studies. A 2016 study found that the Mediterranean diet, with its emphasis on healthy fats, leads to greater long-term weight loss than a traditional low-fat diet.

In the America that I love, there is no “miracle diet.” Be sure to get a healthy balance of nutrients and calories. Always avoid extreme or fad diets, emphasize fresh fruits and vegetables in moderate portions and exercise regularly.

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