

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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May 20, 2018

“Crash Diets May Affect The Heart”

Diets of every genre are available, but many are not considered to be healthful or safe. Such is the case for the so-called “crash diet.” Please remember that there is no such thing as a “miracle diet.” The constant barrage of published diet and nutrition information makes it difficult for clinicians and patients to separate the wheat from the chaff, but research tells us that nutrition is a critical component to human health. Crash diets, also called meal replacement programs, have become increasingly fashionable in the past few years. Crash diets, also known as low-calorie diets, are very appealing to those wishing to lose weight fast—and that is most people. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has warned that they could be dangerous, depriving the body of essential nutrients, and that these effects are particularly worrisome in children and teenagers. Other adverse health effects that scientists have warned about include the slowing down of the metabolism, the weakening of the immune system, and the increasing chances of dehydration and arrhythmia. New research looked specifically at the effects of crash diets on heart health. Researchers say that these diets have a very low-calorie content of 600 to 800 [calories] per day and can be effective for losing weight, reducing blood pressure, and reversing diabetes, but the effects on the heart have not been studied until now. The crash diet revealed some important health benefits after just one week: better insulin resistance and healthier levels of total cholesterol, blood sugar, and blood pressure. But surprisingly, heart fat levels rose by 44%. According to the experts, this change correlated with dysfunctions in the heart's ability to pump blood. By week eight, however, this returned to normal—as did heart function. In fact, these aspects of heart health improved even more than what they used to be before the diet started. As a consequence, experts warn about the extra caution that those with a heart condition need to take before starting a crash diet. They warn, “If you have heart problems, you need to check with your doctor before embarking on a very low-calorie diet or fasting. People with a cardiac problem could well experience more symptoms at this early time point, so the diet should be supervised.” Still, very low-calorie diets need not be avoided altogether, as they do hold benefits. But, caution is needed in people with heart disease.

In the America that I love, we must take control our diet, use portion control and prepare meals with lots of fruits and vegetables. Try to avoid packaged foods. The most successful diet is one that you can easily manage and that you enjoy. Consult your doctor to help monitor your diet.

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