

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

June 24, 2018

“Dietary Hodgepodge is Fascinating and Flawed”

Many diets have caught on without any scientific support and have influenced the nutritional landscape for millions of Americans. Seventy percent of American adults are overweight and more than 35% are obese. But, many trending diet plans have been nothing more than fads. Here are a few of them. *The Beverly Hills Diet*, published in 1981, sold over 1 million copies. The diet was endorsed by actors and entertainers, including Englebert Humperdinck and Linda Gray. Its creator, Judy Mazel (1943-2007)—who had no science or nutrition training—opened a diet clinic in Beverly Hills to promote the diet that had helped her lose more than 70 pounds. The diet promises a weight loss of 10-15 pounds after 5 weeks on a fruit-based diet. Following this period, carbohydrates, fat, and protein are slowly reintroduced according to strict rules: Fruit must always be eaten alone; protein may be combined with fat, but not carbohydrates; carbohydrates must not be combined with protein; and beer counts as carbs, wine as fruit, but champagne is "neutral" and can be consumed at any time. The diet was strongly criticized in a 1981 *JAMA* article by Drs Gabe Mirkin and Ronald Shore for its lack of scientific and nutritional grounding and for Mazel's theory that weight gain is caused by undigested food that gets "stuck" in the body. An updated version of the diet was published in 1996. Judy Mazel died of complications of a stroke at the age of 63. *The Fit for Life diet* was first marketed in 1985 by "nutrition specialists, Harvey and Marilyn Diamond. On the diet, Harvey Diamond "overcame a debilitating, longtime digestive disorder, ended his migraine headaches and lost more than 50 pounds. The book describing the diet reached number 1 on the *New York Times* best-seller list and sold more than 12 million copies. The diet hinges on the "secrets of timing and food combining that work with your natural body cycles"—appropriation (noon to 8 PM), assimilation (8 PM-4 AM), and elimination (4 AM to noon). The authors argue that eating foods in the wrong order provokes "rotting" in the stomach and categorically separates "dead" foods (such as meat and starch, which "clog" digestion) from "living" foods (such as raw fruits and vegetables, which "cleanse" it). Dairy products are to be avoided at all times. The Fit for Life diet has been widely criticized for theories that lack scientific grounding or support from clinical trials. The diet is also likely to provoke vitamin, mineral, and calcium deficiencies, while potentially causing serious complications in patients with diabetes.

In the America that I love, always avoid extreme or fad diets, emphasize fresh fruits and vegetables in moderate portions and exercise regularly.

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