

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Five Most Popular, Doctor-Recommended Diets”

Diets come and go. Some trending diet plans are nothing more than fads with little scientific support. 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. Seventy percent of American adults are overweight and more than 35% are obese. According to a physician survey, these are the top five diets that doctors recommended. 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. 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. Compared with the other diets, doctors overwhelmingly (51%) chose the Mediterranean diet as their favorite one for long-term optimal health. Researchers have consistently shown that the Mediterranean diet reduces the risk of cardiovascular diseases and overall mortality. Researchers attributed this finding to a greater intake of plant foods, whole grains, and fish, a moderate alcohol intake, and a low intake of red and processed meats. About 1 in 6 doctors (16%) recommend the **Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH)** diet for long-term optimal health, the goal of which is to lower blood pressure, largely by limiting foods with sodium. Developed by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, the DASH eating plan also emphasizes less added sugars, fats, and red meats than the typical American diet, but it requires more meal planning in advance. Only 7% of doctors recommend **intermittent fasting** for optimal health. It restricts eating to certain time periods. However, it has drawbacks such as disordered eating behaviors, disrupted sleep, decreased alertness, increased cortisol levels, higher HDL levels, and pancreatic damage. Only 6% of physicians surveyed recommended a **vegan diet** for long-term health. The vegan diet is strict, allowing only plant-based foods and excluding all animal-derived foods, including fish, eggs, and dairy. The vegan diet can result in deficiencies in vitamins B12 and D, calcium, iron, and essential amino acids. A vegan diet has its benefits, including improvements in cardiovascular disease, cardiovascular mortality, overall mortality, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cancer incidence. Only 1 in 20 doctors (5%) who were surveyed recommended the **ketogenic diet**.

In the America that I love, there is no “miracle diet.” 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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