



Center for Young Women's Health
www.youngwomenshealth.org



Fad Diets vs Healthy Weight Management: A Guide for Teens

Fad diets are marketed as quick ways to lose weight. The most popular fads tend to change from year to year, but the promises they make don't. Diets such as the ketogenic diet, whole 30, the paleo diet, juice cleanses and even intermittent fasting are all fads. This guide is designed to help you spot a fad diet and manage your weight in a healthy way.

Do fad diets work?

Some people will lose weight while following a fad diet, but most fad diets are impossible to stick to for long. This means that once you stop following the diet, you'll probably gain back the weight you lost. Some people actually gain back more weight than they started with.

Fad diets don't usually provide enough vitamins and minerals, which can lead to health problems such as anemia (low iron in your blood) and osteoporosis (a condition that causes your bones to break easily when you don't take in enough calcium and vitamin D).

How can you spot a Fad Diet?

You can spot a fad diet by asking yourself a few simple questions:

- Does this diet make some foods completely off-limits?
- Does this diet promise that I will lose an unrealistic amount of weight in a short amount of time?
For example: ten pounds in one week.
- Does this diet refer to foods as "good" or "bad"?
- Do I have to buy certain foods for this diet at a special store?
- Does this diet claim that I can lose weight *without* exercising?
- Is this plan temporary?

If you answered "Yes" to any of these questions, you have probably spotted a Fad Diet! Advertising that promotes these diets is often very convincing. These ads may draw you in and make you believe that it's super easy to follow the diet and lose weight. Don't be fooled. This type of weight loss plan is not a healthy way to lose weight.

Are there healthier ways to manage weight?

Yes! There are much healthier ways to manage weight rather than following a fad diet. We lose weight by eating fewer calories than our bodies burn. To lose weight, add calorie-burning activities into your day, and cut down on the calories you eat. Because a large decrease in the calories you eat can be harmful to your body, try small dietary changes like the suggestions below.

Try these changes to cut back on the calories you eat by:

- Choosing less sugary beverages. Drinks such as soda and juice are loaded with sugar and empty calories. Try tap water, seltzer water, or no calorie flavoring packets instead!
- Eating breakfast! Starting your day with a nutritious meal will prevent you from getting too hungry during the day and will give you energy to think at school.
- Packing fruit for a snack. Choosing fruit over chips or candy will provide your body with important nutrients.
- Eating more whole grains. Choose whole grain bread, whole grain pasta, brown rice, and high-fiber cereals. They are more filling than refined grains such as cookies and pastries.
- Choosing lean proteins. Chicken, turkey, fish and vegetarian sources of protein, such as beans and tofu, contain less fat than other proteins.
- Eating a serving of fruit and/or vegetables. Aim to include one or both at most meals and for snacks.
- Watching your portion sizes. Choose regular portions, not super-sized ones. Eat only until you feel satisfied.

Simple ways to fit exercise into your day include:

- Taking the stairs instead of the elevator
- Walking instead of taking the bus
- Look for exercise videos on Youtube
- Joining a gym
- Joining a sports team or a dance team
- Going for a walk with your family or friends

Is there a way to tell if a diet is healthy?

The healthiest way to successfully lose weight is to make small changes that will fit into your lifestyle. An easy way to make sure that a weight loss program is healthy and right for you, is to see if it includes the following:

- A balance of healthy foods from all food groups (whole grains, fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, low-fat dairy, and healthy dietary fats)
- Regular exercise or physical activity
- Regular portion sizes
- Regular meals and snacks
- Some of your favorite foods
- Flexibility to fit your schedule
- Foods you can find in restaurants or at social events

If your weight loss plan includes all of the above, it is likely a healthy approach. Remember to eat a variety of foods from all the food groups. Choose healthy portion sizes and eat fruits and vegetables from all the colors of the rainbow to get important nutrients for your body. Try to do 60 minutes of exercise most days of the week. It is okay to eat treats once in a while. Making these healthy changes will help you to lose weight, and keep the weight off.

If you have questions about whether or not a diet is healthy, talk with your health care provider who might refer you to see a registered dietitian. A registered dietitian is a specialist on the topic of nutrition and can help you figure out an eating plan that is healthy, balanced, and appealing to you.

Magazine Scavenger Hunt

GOAL

This activity will help participants identify and critique ads for diets and diet products, and help them understand how they can affect our ideas about healthy eating and body weight.

AGES

12-18

ESTIMATED TIME

45-60 minutes

MATERIALS NEEDED

Teen and/or health magazines, **Magazine Scavenger Hunt Worksheet**, post-it notes (*or small pieces of paper*) to bookmark magazine pages, pencils and/or pens

PREPARATION

Collect a variety of magazines, copy enough **Magazine Scavenger Hunt Worksheets** for all participants

DIRECTIONS FOR FACILITATOR

1. Explain to participants that they will be learning how to spot false diet and diet product ads. Tell them that they should think about how these advertisements can send unhealthy messages.
2. Divide the group up into teams of 2-3 participants, pass out the **Magazine Scavenger Hunt Worksheet**, magazines, post-it notes or bookmarks, and pens/pencils.
3. Give participants about 20 minutes to look through several magazines and answer the questions on the worksheet.
4. Explain to participants that they should bookmark the magazine page with a post-it note or paper bookmark when they find an answer to one of the questions on the worksheet. The group will be discussing each question when everyone finishes the exercise.
5. Explain to participants that most diet ads encourage extreme dieting and promise unrealistic weight loss. Reinforce that healthy weight management involves making small, gradual changes that you will be able to keep up for the rest of your life.

6. After all the participants have completed the worksheet, ask for volunteers to discuss what they found in the magazines, and what they wrote down on their worksheets, question by question.

DISCUSSION

1. Ask participants how they felt when they first saw the ad(s). Then ask them how they felt after reading about the diet, or diet product.
2. Discuss ways that young women can respond to diet ads.

POST-ACTIVITES

- A. Have the group write a letter to the editor of a magazine explaining why ads for fad diets and/or diet products should be excluded from teen magazines.
- B. Create their own ad (*using markers, crayons, etc.*) that promotes healthy eating habits.
- C. Design a poster telling others how to spot a fad diet.

Magazine Scavenger Hunt Worksheet

1. Find a magazine ad for a fad diet or diet products (such as diet pills, diet drinks, etc.)

Ask yourself if the ad does any of the following. If it does, place a check mark in the box.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Promises quick weight loss | <input type="checkbox"/> Requires you to buy something in order to participate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Makes claims that certain foods are bad | <input type="checkbox"/> Includes a warning for people with chronic disease |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Uses words such as “amazing”, or “instant” | <input type="checkbox"/> Requires you to take pills |

Other reasons the ad makes the diet or product sound like a fad:

How difficult was it to find the ad? (check one)

- Easy Hard Couldn't Find One

2. Find a diet ad that uses a female to sell their diet or diet product.

Does she look healthy? (check one)

- Yes No

How difficult was it to find the image? (check one)

- Easy Hard Couldn't Find One

3. Did you see any ads in the magazine that promote healthy weight loss?

- Yes No

If you did, what diet or product was it for, and why does it sound healthy?

Program Evaluation

Please help us to improve our presentations by giving us your comments. Thank you!

Topic:

Date:

Presenters:

1. Did you like the presentation? Yes No

Why?

2. Do you think the presenters were prepared? Yes No

3. Do you think this topic was valuable? Yes No

Why, or why not?

4. List two important points that you remember from the presentation.

1.

2.

5. List one thing you plan to change (*or you will do differently*) because of what you learned during the presentation.

6. Do you have any suggestions for the speakers to improve the program?