

# HEALTH IN OUR HANDS!

The Arkansas State University Wellness Program Newsletter  
[www.astate.edu/conhp](http://www.astate.edu/conhp)



## “Fad Diets”

### Overview

Every year we are bombarded by new “diet fads” that give us false promises of the quickest and easiest ways to shed our “unwanted pounds.” But how many people do we actually know that have been able to stick with these fad diets for years and keep the weight off consistently? What exactly is the best diet for us to go on? Here is a look at some of the pros and cons of a few of the most popular diets in our society today.

### Atkins Diet

The Atkins Diet, invented by Dr. Robert Atkins in the 1970s, is one of the most popular low-carb, high-protein fad diets on the market, and claims to help people lose up to 15 pounds in the first two weeks of the diet. Atkins works by limiting dieters' carbohydrate intake and upping fiber intake, so that the body burns fat instead of carbohydrates. It

includes four phases; the first phase has dieters limit carbohydrate intake but encourages liberal consumption of protein-rich meat and fish, eggs, cheese, salad vegetables, butter and oil. With each phase, dieters add in more carbohydrates until they find the balance where they are no longer gaining weight from their diet.

### Cons

Like other low-carb diets, water loss accounts for much of the weight loss at the beginning of the diet. While proponents tout the Atkins diet's short-term effectiveness and say it's easier to stick to than other diets, detractors point out that you're really not getting a well-balanced diet and may particularly be lacking calcium.

### Gluten Free

Many people have gathered around the gluten-free aisles of the grocery store with

misguided information that they will achieve weight loss or good health by eliminating gluten-containing foods from their diet. All foods containing wheat, barley and rye (such as pasta and traditional baked goods) are avoided, while whole foods like fruits, vegetables, beans, lentils, dairy, healthy fats and seeds are promoted.

### Cons

A wide variety of gluten-free packaged foods are now available, but many are loaded with more sugar and fat than their gluten-filled counterparts. This makes it easy to splurge, even on gluten-free foods. Large portions of any foods (such as gluten-free breads or potato chips) can lead to weight gain. This diet can also lack essential nutrients, vitamins, and minerals.

## Paleo

The caveman-inspired Paleo diet has a strong following, and revolves around eating like our Paleolithic ancestors – who lived by hunting and gathering. The Paleo diet encourages fresh fruits and vegetables, seafood, lean meat, and healthy fats. It discourages refined sugars and grains, saturated and trans fat, salt-processed foods and yeast, dairy, and whole grains. It also encourages fun and engaging exercise.

## Cons

Entire food groups – such as whole grains and dairy – are eliminated, making it tougher to take in essential nutrients, including calcium and vitamin D. Choosing the wrong types of meat (those that aren't lean) can increase your risk for heart disease. Many people tend to get stuck on the same foods, which limits overall nutrient intake. It can be dangerous to follow for those with specific diseases (like kidney disease). Purchasing fresh grass-fed and free-range meat, fish and seafood can be pricey.

## Better Choices

To increase weight loss for long-term results you must change your lifestyle and begin healthy habits such as:

- **Eat a variety of foods**

Make sure your diet includes lean protein; complex carbohydrates such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables; and "good" fats like omega-3 fats from fish and monounsaturated fats from avocados, nuts, and olives or olive oil.

- **Say no to bad fats**

Minimize how much saturated fat you get from animal sources, and eliminate trans fats from the fried foods, snacks, and fast-food products you eat.

- **Get 5 a day**

Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Choose different colors of fruits and vegetables to ensure optimal nutrition.

- **Eat smaller meals more frequently**

Aim for five to six mini-meals per day. Space your meals every 3 to 4 hours. Try taking low fat cheese and whole-grain crackers to school or work for a snack, or eat a tablespoon of peanut butter with one slice of whole-grain bread.

- **Fill up on the good stuff**

Pile on the salad and super servings of green beans, broccoli, cabbage, kale, or other low-calorie vegetables instead of high-fat foods, breads, pasta, and desserts.

- **Snack on berries**

Dark berries (blueberries, blackberries, cherries, and raspberries) are rich in healthy antioxidants. They're also low in calories and fat and high in fiber.

- **Avoid "empty calories"**

Steer clear of sugar-containing sodas and fruit drinks.

## References

- <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/blogs/eat-run/2014/01/24/top-fad-diets-love-them-or-leave-them><http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/cirrhosis.html>
- <http://www.livescience.com/35625-4-fad-diets-dont-really-work.html>
- <http://www.webmd.com/diet/guide/the-truth-about-fad-diets?page=2>

## Other News:

\*\*If you have any suggestions for newsletter topics, please contact Dean Susan Hanrahan at [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu).

\*\*\*\*\*

The Arkansas State University Employee Wellness Newsletter is published monthly during the academic year by the College of Nursing and Health Professions. Health questions can be addressed to Dean Susan Hanrahan, Ph.D., ext. 3112 or [hanrahan@astate.edu](mailto:hanrahan@astate.edu). Produced by Kelsie Clark, graduate student in the College of Nursing and Health Professions, Physical Therapy Program.