

**Title: Fad, Fiction, or Fact: What's in Your Diet?**  
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Description: Diet trends are constantly changing and shifting in the nutrition world. Learn about different diets (Keto, Gluten-restricted, and intermittent fasting to name a few), and how to evaluate an eating plan for meeting health, lifestyle, and weight management goals.

**Background information:**

Obesity and overweight conditions are caused by an increase in the size and amount of fat cells in the body. A body weight that is higher than what is considered a healthy weight for height is classified as overweight or obese. The screening tool used to calculate body weight is the body mass index or BMI. A person is classified as overweight if their BMI is greater than 25 but less than 30. A person is classified as obese if their BMI is greater than 30. A BMI between 18.5 and 25 is considered normal while a BMI lower than 18.5 is considered underweight. Men are more often overweight whereas more women than men are classified as obese. The simple cause for overweight and obesity is the body taking in more calories than can be used up through activities of daily living and physical activity. Extra calories consumed and not burned for with activities are stored as fat in the body, which may not be a desirable outcome.

According to National Institutes of Health statistics, almost two thirds of U.S. adults are overweight or obese with 32% of children and teens overweight or obese. With these startling statistics, it is no wonder the business of marketing weight loss programs is growing steadily. While we know that obesity contributes to chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and some cancers, just “losing weight” to accomplish the weight loss goal, may not be best practice. Could there be some diets that could be harmful to overall health? Could some diets produce better results than others?

**Objectives:**

Participants will be able to identify characteristics of healthy and safe eating plans for weight loss and maintenance.

Participants will be able to identify unhealthy characteristics of fad diets.

Participants will be able to calculate personal BMI (optional)

**Suggested handouts or visual aids:**

Handout #1 (MyPlate comparison)

Handout #2 (BMI chart) (Optional activity: pass out a BMI chart to each person. Have the person locate their height in the far left column, and their weight in the columns to the right.

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Circle the weight on the chart, then follow the column to the top of the chart. The number at the top of the weight column is the BMI for that height and weight.

Pen or Pencil

### **Advanced Preparation:**

Prior to teaching the lesson, review the main teaching points and study the handouts. Make copies of the handouts.

### **Discussion/Teaching the Lesson:**

**What is a “diet”?** According to Webster’s dictionary, the word diet means “food and drink regularly provided or consumed.” Using that definition, what we eat on a daily basis is our “diet.” Generally speaking, however, most people call a “diet” an activity to lose weight or “a regime of eating and drinking sparingly so as to reduce weight.” If a diet promises rapid weight loss or large amounts of weight loss in a short period of time, this could be a “fad” diet.

Fad diets are typically not supported by scientific research, and may consist of one or more of the following attributes:

- may limit food groups,
- may be too low in calories for overall health,
- may concentrate on a specific food as “magical”
- are typically a short term fix, rather than a lifestyle change to maintain weight loss with lifestyle changes.

Alternately, a healthy eating plan includes food from all five food groups, focuses more on whole foods, rather than processed foods, includes some type of regular physical activity, and emphasizes strategies to incorporate for a change in lifestyle that can be maintained over time. Especially important is the fact that for a diet to be classified as “healthy,” it has been researched and proven effective by science.

The USDA uses MyPlate to demonstrate a healthy eating plan (see figure one on handout). MyPlate recognizes the importance of all food groups and appropriate serving sizes. It is a “healthy” or “balanced” diet and is backed by science. In contrast, an unhealthy diet typically either restricts or eliminates food groups and/or does not take serving sizes into consideration as well as may not have

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credible research to back up the weight loss claims. Restricting food groups make a diet more difficult to follow long term and rob the body of important nutrients.

Let's talk through a few of the popular "diets" and determine if they would be considered a "fad" or a healthy lifestyle change. We can use the MyPlate handout to help us in our evaluation.

**Keto diet:** The keto diet limits carbohydrates and protein while encouraging a high intake of fat rich foods. On this diet, the body is supposed to lose weight by going in to a state of ketosis, which means the body is breaking down stored fat to use for energy. Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are limited on the keto diet.

**How does the Keto diet compare to the MyPlate eating plan?** *(limits grains, dairy, protein, and fruit all needed for appropriate vitamin and mineral consumption and fiber intake).*

**Gluten-free diet:** The gluten-free diet limits any foods that contain gluten, found in wheat products. Grains made from corn and rye are allowed. This diet makes no stipulation on other food choices and has limited research for weight loss. It is the diet prescribed for a medical condition called celiac disease.

**How does the gluten-Free diet compare to the MyPlate eating plan?** *(eliminates all wheat and wheat containing products but allows some whole grains. Other food groups are not effected).*

**Intermittent Fasting:** There are several different versions of intermittent fasting, which is alternating regular meals with skipping meals. Some plans outline one day eat as normal, the next day nothing but water, while other plans advocate not eating until 2 pm each day and stopping food consumption by 6 pm (meaning all food is consumed in four out of 24 hours each day).

**How does intermittent fasting compare to the MyPlate eating plan?** *(no restrictions on foods or food groups; the restriction is in the time of day the food is eaten. A person could eat from all food groups while following intermittent fasting. While some small studies show this type of eating plan may help one eat fewer calories throughout the day, more research is needed before a final determination on safety and efficacy can be determined).*

**DASH diet:** The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension diet has been around for several years and encourages intake from all food groups, especially foods high in potassium and magnesium, which has been proven to lower blood pressure. Along with low sodium foods, fiber (whole grains and fruits/vegetables) are important parts of the DASH diet, which has research to back up claims of lowering blood pressure, cholesterol, and weight.

**How does the DASH diet compare to the MyPlate eating plan?** *(the DASH diet aligns with MyPlate guidelines and is considered a healthy diet).*

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**Mediterranean Diet:** The Mediterranean Diet has gained popularity recently and includes fish, fruits, vegetables, plant-based fats, and whole grains. Lean meats are limited to 2-3 servings per week and more plant-based proteins are encouraged. Most research to date has been positive for the Mediterranean diet being a healthy eating plan.

**How does the Mediterranean Diet compare to the MyPlate eating plan?** *(the Mediterranean diet aligns with MyPlate guidelines and is considered a healthy diet).*

**MIND diet:** The acronym MIND stands for **M**editerranean-**D**ASH Intervention for **N**eurodegenerative **D**elay diet, combines the portions of the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet and the Mediterranean diet. While it is considered a healthy eating plan by MyPlate standards, more research is needed to validate the claims that the MIND diet improves cognitive function.

**Low carb (Atkins):** The low carbohydrate, high protein diet has been around for more than 20 years, although it goes by different names. This diet limits grains, fruits, and dairy to extremely low levels each day while encouraging high intakes of protein foods (meat) and fat. There has been little research over the years on this diet plan because it is difficult for one to adhere to the diet for a set time.

**How does the low carb diet compare to the MyPlate eating plan?** *(The low carb/high protein diet eliminates food groups from the eating plan while encouraging high intakes of other foods. It would not be considered a healthy eating plan for long term use).*

### **Summary:**

Eating plans that recognize the nutritional value of all food groups while encouraging portion control are usually our best options for maintaining weight loss. Whenever a person takes in fewer calories than the body needs, weight loss may occur. While many diets may result in weight loss, lifestyle changes, such as reducing higher calorie foods, participating in at least 150 minutes per week of physical activity, and getting adequate sleep are all strategies that have been proven to assist in overall health, including modest weight loss. Remember there isn't one magic diet. It takes commitment to making consistent changes over time that promotes long term change.

### **Evaluation:**

### **Resources:**

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Center for Disease Control website: <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/adult/defining.html>

National Institutes of Health website:

[https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose\\_wt/BMI/bmi\\_tbl.htm](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmi_tbl.htm)

Webster's Dictionary: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

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