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Hoping to get in shape for summer? Ditch the fads in favour of a diet more likely to stick

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Hoping to get in shape for summer? Ditch the fads in favour of a diet more likely to stick

Abstract

Weight gain can creep up on us. Over the winter months we enjoy foods that create a feeling of comfort and warmth. Many of these foods tend to be higher in calories, usually from fat or added sugars. As we enter the summer months, some of us start to think about getting in shape - and how we're going to look in a bathing costume. These concerns might be met with the temptation to seek a "quick fix" to weight loss. But this sort of approach is likely to mean finding yourself back in the same position this time next year. Looking past the quick fix and fad diets to longer-term solutions will improve your chance of keeping the weight off and staying healthy all year round.

Keywords

ditch, likely, more, hoping, diet, get, favour, shape, summer?, fads, stick

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Hoping to get in shape for summer? Ditch the fads in favour of a diet more likely to stick

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The benefits of a juice cleanse or detox aren't likely to be sustained over time. From shutterstock.com

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Looking past the quick fix and fad diets to longer-term solutions will improve your chance of keeping the weight off and staying healthy all year round.

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Yasmine Probst receives funding from the NSW Ministry of Health, Multiple Sclerosis Research Australia, the California Walnut Commission and the Illawarra Health and Medical Research Institute. She is affiliated with Food Standards Australia New Zealand and Australian Eggs.

Read more: [Health Check: why do we crave comfort food in winter?](#)

Losing weight shouldn't be a short-term solution

Extra body fat is a risk factor for developing chronic diseases including type 2 diabetes and heart disease. With two in three Australians carrying too much body fat, many of us may be well-intentioned, but not making the best choices when it comes to what we eat.

Weight loss is largely a balance of choosing the right foods and being physically active in order to tip our internal energy balance scales in the right direction.

For the most part, quick-fix diets are based on calorie restriction as a means of weight loss. They focus on different strategies to get you to eat fewer calories without having to actively think about it.

Fad diets tend to share similar characteristics, such as eating fewer varieties of foods, fasting, and replacing meals.

Read more: [Five food mistakes to avoid if you're trying to lose weight](#)

But weight loss isn't just about swapping one or two foods for a month or two; it's about establishing patterns to teach our bodies new habits that can be maintained into the future.

Fad diets and quick fix options can be limited in several respects. For example, they can be difficult to stick to, or people on them can regain weight quickly after stopping the diet. In some cases, there is insufficient research around their health effects in the longer term.

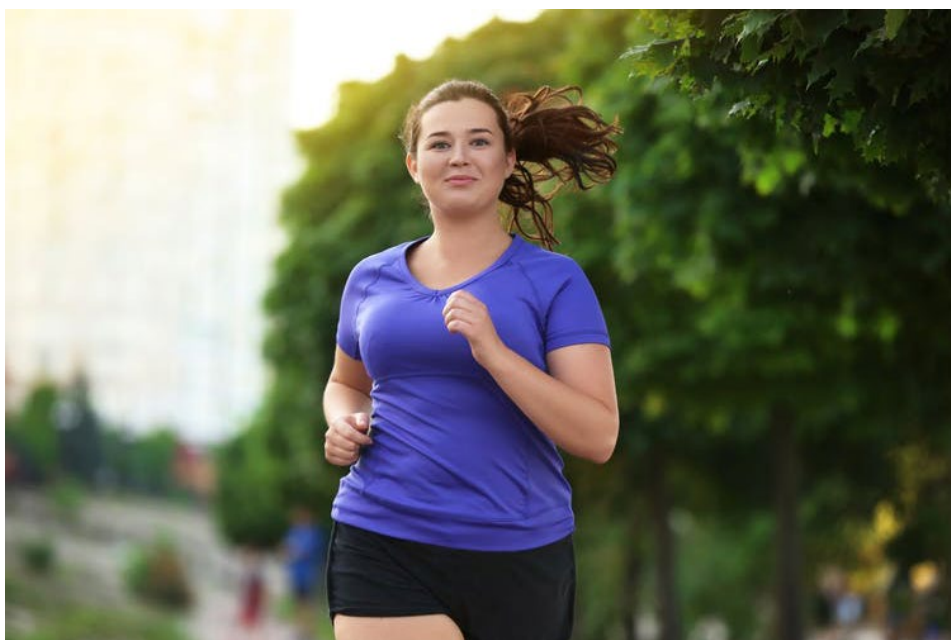
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Exercise is also an important part of losing weight. From shutterstock.com

Let's take a look at the way some of these characteristics feature in three popular diets.

Juicing/detoxification

Juicing or detoxification diets usually last two to 21 days and require a person to attempt a juice-focused form of fasting, often in combination with vitamin or mineral supplements in place of all meals.

People on this diet lose weight rapidly because of the extremely low calorie intake. But this is a severely restricted type of diet and particularly difficult to follow long term without a risk of nutrient deficiency.

Also, while it might hold appeal as a marketing buzzword, detoxification is not a process the body needs to go through. Our livers are efficient at detoxifying with very little help.

Read more: [Trust Me, I'm An Expert: what science says about how to lose weight and whether you really need to](#)

Intermittent fasting

An intermittent fasting diet involves a combination of fasting days and usual eating days. The fasting strategies include complete fasting (no food or drinks are consumed on fasting days) and modified fasting (20-25% of calories is consumed on fasting days).

This diet leads to weight loss due to an overall decrease in calorie intake. But it's hard to stick with the fasting pattern as it results in intense hunger.

Similarly, this diet can lead to binge eating on usual eating days.

But even though people are allowed to eat what they want on non-fasting days, research shows most do not over-eat.

Read more: Blood type, Pioppi, gluten-free and Mediterranean – which popular diets are fads?

Overall, for people who are able to stick with intermittent fasting, we don't have enough evidence on the benefits and harms of the diet over time.

Long term energy restriction without fasting may result in the same weight outcomes and may be a better approach to continued weight management.

The paleo diet

The palaeolithic (paleo) diet was designed to reflect the foods consumed by our Stone Age ancestors before the agricultural revolution.

The paleo diet excludes processed foods and sugars. This recommendation lines up with the current evidence-based dietary recommendations.

However, the paleo diet also excludes two major food groups – grain and dairy foods.



Developing new healthier habits can take time and perseverance, but will pay off. From shutterstock.com

While short-term weight loss might be achieved, there's no conclusive proof of benefit for weight loss and nutritional balance in the long term. People who follow the paleo diet might be at risk of nutritional deficiencies if they're not getting any grains or dairy.

So it's worth taking cues from the paleo diet in terms of limiting processed foods and sugars. But if you're thinking of adopting the diet in its entirety, it would be important to seek support from a health professional to ensure you're not missing out on essential nutrients.

Things to look out for

So how can you tell if a diet is likely to lead to long term weight loss success? Here are some questions to ask:

1. does it incorporate foods from across the five food groups?
2. is it flexible and practical?
3. can the foods be easily bought at the supermarket?

If the answer to these three questions is "yes", you're likely on to a good one. But if you're getting at least one "no", you might want to think carefully about whether the diet is the right choice for sustained weight loss.

[Read more: Four simple food choices that help you lose weight and stay healthy](#)

Of course, seeing results from a diet also depends on your level of commitment. While it may be easier to stay committed in the shorter term, if you want to keep the weight off year round, it's important to make checking in with your food choices part of your ongoing routine.

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