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# The Truth About Trending Diets

Sub-title/Statement/Date

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# What is a Diet?

A “diet” can be defined in a variety of ways, with the two most common being: <sup>1</sup>

1. Kinds of food a person eats
2. Certain types or amounts of food prescribed to a person for a specific health reason or weight management





**54% of Americans have followed a diet or eating pattern in 2024<sup>2</sup>**

**Steady increase from 38% in 2019 (42% increase)<sup>2</sup>**

## **Top Reasons for Following a Specific Diet Eating Pattern<sup>2</sup>**

**Feel better and have more energy (45%)**



**Lose weight (43%)**



**Improve physical appearance (41%)**



**Prevent future health conditions / protect long-term health (41%)**





# Most Common Eating Patterns Followed in 2024<sup>2</sup>



Diet	2024 Prevalence (% followed)	2019 Prevalence (% followed)	% change from 2019-2024
High protein	20%		
Mindful eating	18%		
Intermittent fasting	13%	9%	44%
Calorie counting	12%		
Clean eating	11%	10%	10%
Low-carb	7%	6%	17%
Gluten-free	7%	6%	17%
Mediterranean style	6%	5%	20%
Flexitarian	5%	3%	67%
Intuitive eating	5%		
Low-carbon footprint / sustainable	4%		
Ketogenic or high-fat	4%	6%	-33%
Weight-loss plan	4%	5%	-20%
Vegetarian	3%	3%	0%
Plant-based	3%	5%	-40%
DASH eating plan	2%	2%	0%
Cleanse	2%	2%	0%
Vegan	2%	3%	-33%
Paleo	1%	3%	-67%



# What is a Fad Diet?

A fad diet can be defined as a “trendy dietary pattern known to be a quick fix for long term problems”<sup>3</sup>

## Indicators of Fad Diets / Fad Diet Red Flags<sup>3,4</sup>



### **BIG PROMISES**

- Rapid weight loss
- Miracle cures
- Quick fixes – minimal work or effort



### **SPECIFIC FOOD COMBINATIONS / AVOIDANCES**

- Limitations & avoidance of entire food groups
- Rigid menus and routines



### **LACK OF SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE**

- Limited or inconsistent scientific evidence available
- Based more on questionable information or stories
- Simple conclusions drawn from complex science
- Non-reputable sources



# Potential Issues with Fad Diets<sup>3,5</sup>



## **Nutritionally inadequate**

Due to missing food groups or extreme food restrictions



## **Changes are only short-term**

Extreme diets are often not sustainable, leading to issues maintaining changes



## **Could be detrimental for those with chronic diseases**

Doctors often aren't consulted so other conditions and/or medications aren't taken into consideration



# Drawbacks of Restrictive Diets

## Calorie Restriction



Risk for low blood sugar –  
fatigue, light-headedness,  
fainting<sup>3,5</sup>

Potential to lose muscle and  
bone mass instead of fat<sup>3,5</sup>



## Food Group Restriction



The brain needs  
glucose (sugar from  
carbohydrates) to  
function properly<sup>3</sup>

Risk for vitamin &  
mineral deficiencies<sup>5</sup>

High amounts of  
nutrients to limit (i.e.  
saturated fat from  
animal protein)<sup>5</sup>





# Quick Review of Trending Diets

- 1 Intermittent Fasting
- 2 Clean Eating
- 3 Low-Carbohydrate / Keto
- 4 Gluten-Free
- 5 Plant-Based
- 6 Paleo







# Intermittent Fasting



**2024 prevalence: 13%**  
44% increase in past 5 years <sup>2</sup>

## What is intermittent fasting (IF)?

Involves restricting eating times rather than types or amounts of food eaten.<sup>6</sup>  
The idea is when you are not fasting, you can eat whatever you want.

Followed by 13% of Americans recently surveyed, usually for weight loss purposes.<sup>2</sup>

## What does the science say? <sup>6-9</sup>



**Any weight loss is largely due to the decrease in calories during the fasting period.**

However, overall effectiveness is not different from other low-calorie diet plans.

### Scientific evidence is lacking

Many studies are on small groups of people or limited to animals (not generalizable) and for very short periods (long-term effects not known).

More research is needed regarding potential negative side effects, such as risk for nutrient deficiencies.

## 3 types of intermittent fasting <sup>6</sup>

### The 5:2 Diet

Regularly eating 5 days per week and fasting (or mostly fasting) on the other 2 days

#### Effectiveness:

Can lead to weight loss due to the average 20-25% calorie reduction often experienced

### Alternative Day Fasting (ADF) or alternative-day modified fasting

Switching back-and-forth between days of fasting (or mostly fasting) and feeding

#### Effectiveness:

Any weight loss is related to calorie reduction. "Big eaters" generally don't lose weight because they often make up their calories on their feeding days

### Time-Restricted Feeding (TRF)

Limits eating to a reduced window of time, typically <10 hours per day

(example: if you eat breakfast at 9:00 a.m., you need to stop eating at 7:00 p.m. to maintain a 10 hour fast window).

#### Effectiveness:

Appears to be the easiest method to maintain, so it could potentially be the most effective for weight loss and/or maintenance

## Bottom line <sup>6-9</sup>

Intermittent fasting is not currently a recommended treatment for weight loss or any other health condition.

Different diets can work better for different people, but the key is how well you follow the diet and how easy it is to maintain those habits long term.



# Clean Eating

**2024 prevalence:** 11%  
10% increase in past 5 years<sup>2</sup>



## What is clean eating?

Lack of a clear definition or regulatory guidance on what is considered “clean eating” with interpretations varying widely<sup>10,11</sup>

Generally considered eating foods that are minimally processed and/or have simple ingredients without additives, preservatives, or other artificial ingredients.<sup>11-14</sup>

## Common perceptions

“Clean eating” trend may stem from lack of awareness of ingredient names or purposes, leading to an interpretation that they are not natural or healthy.<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes associated with other designations such as “non-GMO,” or “organic.”<sup>11,15</sup>



## Perceived health benefits & scientific evidence

Lack of a clear definition means research specifically on “clean eating” is limited<sup>11</sup>

### Diet Quality

- Most common reason for following “clean eating” pattern<sup>11-13,16</sup>
- Available research did not find a significant difference in nutritional quality between less processed (“clean”) food items and their more processed counterparts, but did find the “clean” items to be more expensive and have a shorter shelf life.<sup>13</sup>
- According to Center of Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), “clean label” does not mean a product is healthy, with many products marketed as being “clean” having very high levels of sodium, saturated fat, and sugar.<sup>15</sup>



## Nutrition considerations

Compared to similar options not labeled as “clean”, “clean” products and recipes have been shown to have<sup>15,17</sup>



**HIGHER**  
protein  
fiber  
fat

**SIMILAR**  
calories  
carbohydrates  
sugar  
sodium



# Low-Carbohydrate / Keto



**2024 prevalence:** 7% (low-carb), 4% (keto)  
10% increase in low-carb, 33% decrease in keto in past 5 years<sup>2</sup>

## What is a low-carbohydrate and/or ketogenic (keto) diet?

Restriction of carbohydrate intake at varying levels while promoting higher intakes of protein and fat.<sup>18-20</sup>

**PURPOSE / MECHANISM** - induces nutritional ketosis<sup>18</sup>

Forces body to use fat instead of the preferred carbohydrates as main energy source

## Rules

Recommendations for % daily calories from each macronutrient by diet<sup>18-20</sup>

	Carbohydrates	Protein	Fat
Low-Carb	~25%	40-50%	30-40%
Keto (very low-carb)	5-10%	20-25%	70-80%
Normal (DGA)	45-65%	10-35%	20-35%

## Perceived health benefits & scientific evidence

Most current research conducted with low-carb diets



### Weight loss/gain

low-carb diets

Some evidence for significant weight loss with related to lower calorie intake, but results not significantly different when compared to other lower calorie diets<sup>18, 20-22</sup>



### Heart Disease

low-carb diets

Some evidence for significant improvements in cardiovascular risk factors (likely related to weight loss), but unclear if improvement is significantly different compared to other diets<sup>18, 22</sup>



### Type 2 Diabetes

low-carb diets

Some evidence for significant improvements in some measures of diabetes management in the short-term (likely related to weight loss), but changes were not significant in the long-term or compared to normal or other diets<sup>18, 22</sup>



### Neurological conditions

keto diets

Limited, low-quality evidence for association with short-term seizure reduction in children (and some adults) with drug-resistant epilepsy<sup>18</sup>

## Nutrition considerations

Diet quality compared to normal control diet<sup>27</sup>



**HIGHER**  
protein  
fat (total and saturated)



**LOWER**  
calories  
sodium  
fiber  
vitamins A, E, & K  
minerals (folate, magnesium, & selenium)



# Gluten-Free

**2024 prevalence:** 7%  
17% increase in past 5 years<sup>2</sup>



## What is a gluten free diet?

Exclusion of products with the protein gluten, which gives structure and elasticity to certain grains, allowing them to maintain their shape<sup>23</sup>

Commonly followed by individuals with celiac disease or gluten-intolerance – an autoimmune condition where an immune response to gluten causes damage to the small intestine, resulting in reduced nutrient absorption<sup>24</sup>

## Rules & foods excluded

excludes any gluten-containing grains, primarily:<sup>23</sup>

Wheat



Rye



Barley



## Perceived health benefits & scientific evidence



### Weight loss/gain

- Moderate evidence for weight loss in healthy individuals (independent of calorie restriction)<sup>25</sup>
- Some evidence for weight gain in celiac disease patients (due to improved nutrient absorption with small intestine healing)<sup>26,27</sup>



### Neurological conditions

(Behavioral & seizure activity, Schizophrenia, MS, Autism)

Limited / no evidence



### Digestive health

Strong positive evidence in celiac disease patients only, related to healing of the small intestine<sup>28</sup>



### Chronic disease

(Risk of Cardiovascular Disease, Type 2 Diabetes)

Limited / no evidence

## Nutrition considerations

Diet quality compared to normal control diet<sup>27</sup>



**HIGHER**  
calorie  
fat (total and  
saturated)



**LOWER**  
protein  
fiber  
vitamins & minerals  
(iron, folate, zinc,  
calcium)



# Plant-Based

**2024 prevalence:** 3% plant-based  
6% Mediterranean, 5% flexitarian, 3% vegetarian, 2% vegan

**In past 5 years:** 20% increase in Mediterranean, 67% increase in flexitarian,  
33% decrease in vegan, no change in vegetarian<sup>2</sup>



## What is a plant-based diet?

While there is no universal definition of a “plant-based eating pattern,” they generally include a variety of dietary patterns with varying degrees of lower animal-based foods.

They focus on unrefined whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts & seeds while reducing or eliminating meat, dairy foods, eggs, or other animal by-products.<sup>29,30</sup>

## Perceived health benefits & scientific evidence

A growing body of research suggests, but does not yet prove, plant-based eating patterns support positive health outcomes. Most studies have been conducted with vegan, vegetarian, and Mediterranean dietary patterns. More research is needed to determine the impact of other plant-based eating patterns and determine the reason behind these benefits.



### Weight loss/gain

- Plant-based eating patterns may be associated with weight loss, decreased weight gain, and improved body composition due to lower calorie intake and increased satiety from a high fiber diet.<sup>32</sup>
- A large amount of research suggests people following vegetarian diets without calorie restriction may lose more weight than non-vegetarian groups.<sup>33</sup>



### Type 2 Diabetes

- A large, long-term study suggests eating less animal products is associated with a lower the risk of type 2 diabetes.<sup>34</sup>
- Research also suggests vegan diets may be helpful in diabetes management, including better glycemic control and decreased use of medication.<sup>35</sup>



### Cancer

- Analysis of several studies suggests plant-based eating patterns may be associated with lower risk of cancer - 8% lower with vegetarian diets and 15% lower with vegan diets.<sup>36</sup>
- While the mechanism is not well understood, this is likely due to the high consumption of fiber, antioxidants, and other nutrients found in plant foods, along with the reduced intake of fat from animal products.<sup>37</sup>



### Digestive & gut health

- The high fiber content of plant-based eating patterns may help promote overall digestive health.<sup>38</sup>
- Emerging research suggests plant-based eating patterns promote the development of a more diverse gut microbiota, though more research is needed to determine how this impacts overall health.<sup>39</sup>

## Types of Plant-Based Diets<sup>29,30</sup>

Diet	Description	Foods Included / Excluded				
		Beef, Poultry, Pork	Seafood	Dairy	Eggs	Other animal by-products
<b>Vegan</b>	Entirely plant-based, excluding all animal and animal-derived products and ingredients	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
<b>Vegetarian</b>	Excludes all animal products with varying degrees of exclusion for animal-derived products	✗	✗	Maybe	Maybe	Maybe
<b>Mediterranean</b>	Stems from traditional meals in Mediterranean countries, characterized by high consumption of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and healthy fats	Limited	✓	Moderate	✓	✓
<b>Flexitarian</b>	Semi-vegetarian eating pattern that reduces meat consumption & occasionally incorporates more plant-based dishes or meals	Moderate	✓	✓	✓	✓

## Nutrition considerations

While plant-based eating patterns can be healthful, not all plant-based foods are nutrient-dense. Individuals should be mindful of an eating pattern that ensures adequate nutrient intake (especially **high-quality protein, zinc, iron, calcium, vitamin D, and vitamin B12** which are often under-consumed with plant-based diets) while limiting excess saturated fats, sodium, and added sugars.<sup>29,30</sup>



# Paleo

**2024 prevalence:** 1% (least popular)  
67% decrease in past 5 years<sup>2</sup>



## What is a paleo diet?

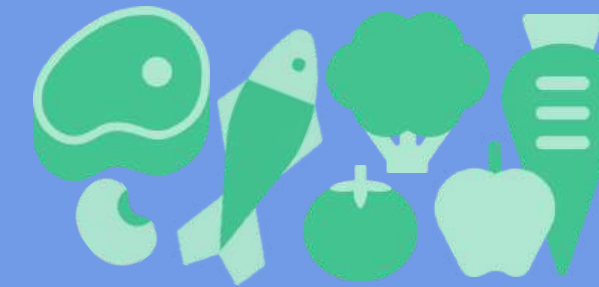
Diet similar to **Paleolithic pre-agricultural, hunter-gatherer** periods<sup>40,41</sup>  
i.e. focus on foods that can be hunted, fished, or gathered (meats & seafood, fruits & vegetables)<sup>41</sup>

**Characterized by:** higher protein, moderate to higher fat, lower carbohydrate<sup>40,41</sup>

## Rules & foods excluded<sup>40,41</sup>

### FOCUS ON

Protein foods (meat & seafood),  
unsaturated fats, and fresh fruits /  
vegetables as main source of  
carbohydrates



### FOODS EXCLUDED

Grains, legumes, dairy, potatoes,  
processed foods, artificial  
sweeteners



## Perceived health benefits & scientific evidence



### Weight loss

Some evidence for significant  
short-term weight loss (due  
to lower calorie intake)<sup>42,43</sup>



### Heart Disease

Inconsistent improvements  
in risk factors compared to  
normal diet<sup>42,44</sup>



### Type 2 Diabetes

Moderate evidence for significant improvement in some  
measures of diabetes management (likely related to weight  
loss), but changes are not significantly different than those  
seen in normal diets with the same decrease in calories.<sup>42,44-46</sup>

## Nutrition considerations

Diet quality compared to normal control diet<sup>41,44-46</sup>



### HIGHER

protein  
fiber

vitamin A, C, E, B5, B12  
fat (total & unsaturated)



### LOWER

sodium  
saturated fat  
vitamin D  
calcium  
potassium



# Science Takeaways



**Much of the evidence for weight loss with any diet can be largely explained by a calorie deficit<sup>47</sup>**

Our bodies utilize the energy from food to support normal body functions

When we consume less energy than our body needs, we lose weight



**Often, diets cut out key nutrients and food groups, which can be harmful to our health long term<sup>4</sup>**

Always consult your physician or registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN)



**Following healthy eating patterns is the best way to ensure you are getting the right nutrients you need at an appropriate caloric level<sup>48</sup>**

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans provide a general framework and tips for healthy eating (see next slide)



# Key Points of a Healthy Dietary Pattern

## Dietary Guidelines for Americans<sup>48</sup>



Follow a **healthy dietary pattern** at **every life stage**

To meet nutrient needs, help achieve a healthy body weight, and reduce the risk of chronic disease

**Customize and enjoy nutrient-dense** food and beverage choices

Allow choices to reflect personal preferences, cultural traditions, and budgetary considerations



Focus on meeting **food group needs** with **nutrient-dense** foods and beverages while staying within **calorie limits**

Including a variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy, protein, and oil

**Limit** foods and beverages higher in added **sugars, saturated fat, and sodium**

And limit alcoholic beverages







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