

Nourishing Notes

Rating Weight Loss Diets

It seems that almost every day you hear about a new and miraculous weight loss diet! Many claim to help you lose a lot of weight in a short period of time with little or no effort. How can you judge if the diet is healthy? Below are some tips to help you rate the diet.

- Does the diet promise dramatic, rapid weight loss, like 10 pounds or more in one week? If it sounds too good to be true, it is! It is possible to lose several pounds of water in a short period of time, but it takes a deficit of 3,500 calories to lose 1 pound of body fat. That is more calories than most people eat in one day, so even on a complete fast, you won't lose 10 pounds of fat in one week! You can, however, become dangerously dehydrated.
- Does the diet provide a reasonable amount of calories (not fewer than 1200 for women and 1500 for men per day)? The average woman consumes about 2000 calories a day and the average man around 2500 calories. Reducing your intake by 500 calories a day will result in a safe weight loss of about 1 pound per week. Aim to lose no more than 1 – 2 pounds per week.
- Does the diet eliminate whole food groups or specific nutrients such as carbohydrate? Carbohydrate is the main source of fuel for your body. Eating less than 100 grams a day means that protein has to be used for energy instead of for its primary role of maintaining the body's tissues and vital organs. If body fat is used for energy, it produces toxic substances called ketones that the body must get rid of through the urine. This can lead to severe dehydration, as well as other serious problems. The best diet is one that provides adequate protein, fat, and carbohydrate and includes foods from all four food groups of *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*.
- Does the diet offer variety so that you are not eating the same food every day? Eating a variety of foods from each food group every day is important to get all the nutrients you need.
- Does the diet promote unproven remedies, herbal supplements, or other aids that are supposed to help you lose weight without changing your eating or physical activity habits? Most of these remedies are ineffective for weight loss and can possibly endanger your health. The few that work may contain Ma Huang (ephedra) or large doses of caffeine, both of which can be dangerous. Health Canada advises Canadians not to use products containing the herb *Ephedra* in combination with caffeine and other stimulants for purposes of weight loss, body building, or increased energy.

There is no quick solution for losing weight. A healthy and long-lasting weight loss results from a sensible pattern of eating based on *Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating*, combined with regular physical activity. Make smart choices to gradually change your eating and physical activity habits, and keep the weight off for good!