

## FAD DIETS

### AHA Recommendation

The American Heart Association has declared war on fad diets. Our nutrition experts recommend adopting healthy eating habits permanently, rather than impatiently pursuing crash diets in hopes of losing unwanted pounds in a few days.

### Why declare war on fad diets?

**To inform the public about misleading weight-loss claims.** Many fad diets -- like the infamous **Cabbage Soup Diet** -- can undermine your health, cause physical discomfort and lead to disappointment when you regain weight soon after you lose it.

Fad diets usually overemphasize one particular food or type of food. They violate the first principle of good nutrition: Eat a balanced diet that includes a variety of foods. If you are able to stay on a fad diet for more than a few weeks, you may develop nutritional deficiencies, because no one type of food has all the nutrients necessary for good health. The Cabbage Soup Diet is an example. This so-called fat-burning soup is eaten mostly with fruits and vegetables. The diet supposedly helps heart patients lose 10-17 pounds in seven days before surgery.

- There are no "superfoods." That's why you should eat moderate amounts from all food groups, not large amounts of a few special foods.
- Fad diets also violate a second important principle of good nutrition: Eating should be enjoyable. Fad diets are so monotonous and boring that it's almost impossible to stay on them for long periods.
- A liquid protein diet, using digested collagen with little or no essential substances added, became popular several years ago. But in 1977 this diet was blamed for at least 60 deaths.
- Let's set the record straight about the American Heart Association's eating plan for healthy adults. Many of these diets falsely say they are endorsed by or authored by the American Heart Association.

**The public should know that the real American Heart Association eating plan gives recommended servings per day of various food categories, not of specific foods.** Our real eating plan recommends that healthy people get less than 30 percent of their total calories each day from fat. The emphasis is on decreasing saturated fat

intake. It also recommends eating five or more servings of fruits and vegetables every day.

Any diet that gives specific menus or suggests that it be followed for a set period of time isn't from the American Heart Association. The real American Heart Association diet has been carefully researched and is intended for a lifetime of use. **Most important, the real American Heart Association eating plan accommodates the needs of people with diverse food preferences.**

Unlike an incomplete liquid protein diet or other fad diets, a good diet can be eaten for years to maintain desirable body weight and good health. Fad diets fail to provide ways to keep weight off.

### **In what other ways are fad diets flawed?**

- Many don't encourage physical activity -- for example, walking 30 minutes most days of the week. This helps you maintain weight loss over a long period. Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for heart disease and increases the risk of stroke.
- Because fad diets require drastic changes in eating patterns, you can't stay on them for long. Fad dieters don't learn anything about permanently changing their eating patterns.
- In addition, many fad diets are based on "food folklore," some dating back to the early 19th century. Diets high in protein, for example, are also usually higher in fat. They could have serious health risks -- like raising cholesterol levels -- if followed over a long time. Ideas about "fat-burning foods" and "food combining" are also classified by the American Heart Association as unsubstantiated myths.

**Despite what fad diet books may say, the only sensible way to lose weight permanently is to eat less and maintain or increase physical activity. Some major medical centers prescribe extremely low-calorie, high-protein diets for selected patients carefully monitored by physicians.**

### **What is the best way to lose weight?**

A healthy diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables along with regular physical activity can help most people manage and maintain weight loss for both cardiovascular health and appearance. The American Heart Association urges people to take a safe and proven route to losing and maintaining weight -- by following our guidelines for healthy, nutritionally balanced weight loss for a lifetime of good health.