



### **Searching for a Diet that Works**

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"I just want a diet that works!" That's the plea from confused people who feel overwhelmed by today's many diet options, or frustrated that their diets seldom bring long-term results. The diet that works for you, however, will be the one that removes or reduces the foods you overeat in a way that you can live with permanently. There are plenty of options to consider.

New studies show that the wildly popular low-carbohydrate diets do tend to produce slightly greater weight loss than more conventional diets in the first six months. But after a whole year, the low-carbohydrate diets hold no significant weight loss advantage. A closer look at the data from these studies also reveals that, even in the short-term, low-carb diets produced good weight loss for some, but not for others.

Although authors of low-carb diets develop complex biological explanations to support them, these diets probably work better for some people by changing behavior. People following this diet clearly know what foods to eat. They don't have to think about portion size or agonize over taking a little bit of some food. The result is that these people tend to consume fewer calories. The high amount of protein helps satisfy hunger, boosting people's ability to skip forbidden carbs.

Dieters most likely to benefit from a low-carb diet, at least in the short term, are people whose excess calories come from too much pasta, potatoes, bagels, soft drinks, juice, or carbohydrate-based snacks. But these foods are difficult to avoid forever. Feelings of deprivation may force dieters to break down and binge on them. Even if this

doesn't happen, low-carb dieters will eventually have to learn portion control and healthy snack choices, if they want more variety in their diet.

For a long time, lowfat diets were considered the optimal way to lose weight, since fat is the most concentrated source of calories. Many studies have shown that when people reduce fat intake by choosing leaner meats, dairy products and snacks, they tend to lose weight.

But lowfat dieters may forget that cutting calories is the heart of weight loss. If they heavily consume fat-free sweets and grain goods, they achieve neither weight loss nor good health. If a lowfat diet includes adequate protein at each meal, as well as high-fiber whole grains, fruits and vegetables, it will satisfy hunger well. But eating fat-free salads or pasta alone spurs hunger every few hours. Lowfat dieters need to eat balanced meals and snacks in appropriate portions- not just fewer fat grams - for long-term success.

Diets that replace all or some meals and snacks with special "diet" drinks or bars also attract many people. Several studies document their short-term effectiveness. These meal replacements, with about 200-250 calories, are substantially lower in calories than full meals. They are quick and convenient for people who eat on the run or who forget to prepare fruits and vegetables. Because these diet drinks and bars have such a low-calorie content, however, wise snack choices are essential for this diet to succeed. Another possible pitfall is that eating too lightly during the day may cause overeating at night. Any diet can work for you in the short term if it targets what you've been overeating. But the drop in overall calorie consumption is the real reason you lose weight. Keep in mind that none of these diets helps people who overeat in response to stress or emotions. These eating habits need new approaches to handling life's challenges.

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If you need help to improve your eating habits and prevent weight gain, *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*<sup>™</sup> can help. Contact your local base Health and Wellness Center (HAWC) or Dietitian for more information or visit the *Shape Your Future...Your Weigh!*<sup>™</sup> community website at <http://airforcemedicine.afms.mil/shapeyourfuture>.