**It can be a confusing world out there trying to choose an eating program that works for you. Below are 15 different programs. Some are strictly for weight loss. Others are meant to totally change your eating habits. See your professional health services provider before starting on any new diet.**

**Disadvantages of most any Diet Program**

Face it any eating program can be and usually is restrictive. Some diets are unhealthy -- think the four bananas a day or the cabbage soup diet. Some are meant to only be used to jump start your weight loss program like the green smoothie diet.

Time Consuming

Meals must be prepared from scratch for the most part. That entails grocery shopping or at least making a grocery list and having the foods delivered. Cooking the food and packing it up for later consumption takes time as well. In the long run you'll save money if you plan out your meals for the week. Make a menu and a shopping list. Use one of the grocery store delivery services or online shopping services where you pick up your groceries. If that seems overwhelming, plan your meals for the next four days -- that's only 12 meals. You'll have all the ingredients on hand and nothing you shouldn't have.

Cooking Skills

There are a number of meal delivery systems that deliver the ingredients and cooking instructions for a variety of diet programs, but for the most part, meals must be prepared at home. That's not an insurmountable obstacle. Learning to cook isn't rocket science. Get yourself a basic cookbook or an online video and start preparing your own foods. Grab your partner and do it together. Assign the kids a meal or two every week so they learn the basics as well. Treat yourself by signing up for one of the meal delivery services for a night or two to give yourself a break.

Limited Variety of Foods

Yes, in some programs the list of allowable foods is rather extensive, in other programs it seems there are more forbidden foods, than allowable. It also means you may have to forgo some of your favorite dishes such as pasta, pizza and fast food. Sugar and flour are used in a number of products that may surprise you. Use your new diet program as an opportunity to try foods you wouldn't normally. For example, bison is carried in well-stocked supermarkets. It's flavor and texture is close to beef. Try some different vegetables. For example, if you like green beans, you'll probably like kohlrabi.

Eating Away from Home

Two out of three meals are consumed away from home. Most of us eat lunch at school, a restaurant or fast food outlet. That means you'll have to brown bag most of the meals to make sure you stick with your diet choice. Eating at a restaurant is particularly challenging. Butter is used to coat meats and vegetables as a matter of course to enhance the flavors. Seasoning mixtures often include flour to thicken sauces. Sugar is used in salad dressings.

**Atkins Low Carb**

The low carb diet is based on the premise that carbohydrates cause people to gain weight. By severely limiting the number of carbs consumed and replacing with protein, the body is thrown into ketosis. Ketosis is burning fat instead of transforming carbs into blood sugar. Your body gets its energy by turning carbs into glucose or blood sugar, if you aren’t consuming enough carbs to fulfill your body’s requirement then it turns to protein and fats.

A low carb diet limits carb consumption to less than net 20 grams per day. Carbs from fiber are netted out. For example 1 cup of green beans is 7 carbs. However, 3 of those carbs are fiber, so the net carb count is 4. A bagel is a whopping 48 grams.

You don’t count calories but carbs.

The diet is restrictive. Breads, sugar, fast food, pasta and so forth have too many carbs to be included. Even fruits because of their sugar count are excluded for the most part.

There are no limits on protein and fats, but there are limits on dairy such as milk because it contains natural sugars. Cheese, butter, and sour cream on the other hand are okay.

After 3 days of low carb eating, your body is in a state of ketosis, which means you’re burning fat for energy. The downside is one day of eating more than the allowable grams of carbs throws your body out of ketosis.

**Juicing**

Breaking down vegetables and fruits by juicing not only gives your digestive system a break but also loads your system with vitamins, minerals and micronutrients released by the juicing process. Juicing, sometimes called a juice fast, can be done for a single day, several days in a row or several nonconsecutive days in a week or for up to a week or two.

Unlimited amounts of vegetable juice are allowed, but fruit juice is limited because of the high sugar content of fruits. While vegetable juice is available in some well-stocked grocery stores, most, if not all, of those juices have been pasteurized which kills off some of the benefits of juice program.

Investing in a high-quality juicer is a must. A blender doesn’t extract all the juice and leaves all the fiber.

Protein is added to the juice fast program with nut milks. Some programs advice adding pea protein powder as well.

The juicing program is very restrictive and rather time consuming. Quite a bit of produce is necessary. Two and half bunches of kale yields one cup of juice. One bunch of celery produces one cup of juice. The alternative is to buy the juice from a health food store or join one of the delivery programs.

**Gluten-Free Diet**

Gluten is the red-haired, stepchild of the diet world. It is found in wheat, rye, barley based foods and food products. Some of your favorite dishes may be include gluten such as breads and pastas. It is a staple in the modern world. Think about it. Breakfast includes a toasted English muffin. Lunch is a turkey sandwich on sourdough bread and dinner is pasta with Bolognese sauce. Not only that, gluten is found as a thickener, used as a coating -- think chicken nuggets and in snack foods such as pretzels. So what's wrong with gluten?

Some proponents say that gluten is difficult to digest and inflammatory. The inflammation causes the gluten to leak out of the gut – intestines - causing all sorts of problems.

A gluten-free diet means you have to check the labels of all food products besides giving up foods you know include gluten. That’s trickier than it sounds. Wheat flour is often used as a thickener in processed foods and might not be listed as flour or wheat. Many manufactured products boast being gluten free, which may be true, but the product never included gluten in the first place.

Eating in restaurants is tricky as again, wheat flour is often used to thicken sauces. Your best bet is to ask for salad with oil and vinegar on the side and a roasted chicken entrée with a side of say potatoes.

Substitutes for wheat flour include rice flour and nut flours among others. You can just substitute and equal amount of say nut flours and expect the recipe to turn out the same as if you used wheat flour.

**Smoothies and Soups**

Similar to the juicing program but the fruits and vegetables are blended rather than juiced. That adds lots of fiber to the diet. Some programs require that certain combinations are more effective for weight loss that others. This is a plant-based diet, for the most part. However some programs include yogurt. Smoothie ingredients include vegetables, fruits, and nut milks. Protein powder from a plant source such as pea protein or whey is included.

The soups are a hot alternative to the smoothies and usually consumed for lunch or dinner or a snack. Some good for you fats are included such as olive oil.

**Whole Foods**

When you go on a whole food eating program it's not a "diet" that when you've lost the weight you go back to your old eating habits. It's a way of eating that lasts a lifetime. There's no need to feel deprived because of the wide variety of foods. The program focuses on plant-based dishes where the ingredients are minimally processed and as close to nature as possible.

Of course vegetables, fruits, seeds and nuts are on the menu. Even potatoes, corn and sweet potatoes are included. So if you want a baked potato go ahead and have one, topped with olive oil, scallions and fresh herbs.

So are eggs, organic meats, poultry, whole grains and seafood Dairy is included on some whole food diet programs but not in others. Dairy foods such as yogurt, cheese, and milk are minimally processed. Whole wheat breads and pastas? Well that's up to you. If you don’t recognize any of the ingredients don’t eat that product.

There isn't much on the forbidden list but it does include white flour, white pasta, and sugar. Stick with vegetable oils such as olive, coconut, and avocado.

**Whole30**

This program is a subset of the Whole Foods Program. It jump starts the program with more restricted foods than Whole Foods. You must eliminate completely the following foods for the next 30 days. Then slowly add them back one at a time. If a food causes inflammation then you drop it permanently.

All added sugars and artificial sweeteners

Grains (refined and whole)

Legumes, peas, and soy products

Peanut butter

Dairy

Highly processed foods and foods with certain additives

Alcohol

**What Is the Paleo Diet - - Also Known as the Caveman Diet?**

The Paleo diet, also known as the caveman diet, is a simple concept: Eat like the prehistoric humans did 10,000 years ago. In other words like a hunter-gather not like a herdsmen-farmer and certainly not like modern man. What does that mean?

Think of prehistoric man hunting and prehistoric woman gathering for the night's supper. The menu might have the day's catch of bison accompanied by greens, herbs, and vegetables, simmered in an aromatic stew. Or perhaps fresh fish grilled over an open fire with wild carrots and onions. What you won't find are foods such as diary products, wheat, bread, rice, pasta or any other processed food. Foods such as legumes, sugar, and grains aren't on the menu either.

The concept behind the Paleo diet is that our digestive systems aren't equipped to handle consumption of these modern foods resulting in weight gain, indigestion, sluggishness, and a buildup of toxins. Some proponents of the Paleo diet insist that we should adhere strictly to what was available 10,000 years ago and others aren't so adamant.

Proteins include just about every kind of meat, fish, fowl and if you want to get funky, edible insects and amphibians such as frogs, turtles, and snakes. The jury is out on whether processed meats are allowed or not. For instance, smoked bacon might be considered okay. After all cavemen probably did preserve some of their kill and smoking would be an easy way to do it, as would salting fish or drying meats in the sun. Does that mean bacon and ham from the deli counter are allowable? Probably not. Modern processed meats have additives such as preservatives, added colors and sometimes even gluten added. Rotisserie chicken and roasted turkeys from the grocers have added broth and salt as tenderizers.

Fruits are part of the Paleo diet but in moderation. If you've been to a forest lately, you've probably seen wild berries, perhaps even apples, grapes and strawberries growing. But you won't find a great variety ripening at the same time and you won't find -- unless you live in the tropics -- many fruit trees and bushes with fruit ripe at around the same area and time.

Vegetables and plant based foods are a mainstay of the Paleo diet. Almost all veggies are included with the exception of white potatoes. Some Paleo regimes restrict starchy vegetables such as peas, corn and fresh beans. (Dried beans and other legumes are not allowed.)

**Vegetarian**

Often a vegetarian eating program results in weight loss because animal proteins which are calorie intense aren’t allowed. Only plant-based food and dairy foods are on the menu. Tofu and other protein sources such as quinoa, dried peas, lentils, and combinations such as rice and beans replace the meat. Cheese is allowed but used in moderation because it is high in fat. Nuts and seeds are other protein sources. Dairy products are on the menu as well.

A vegetarian diet can be very filling as the portions of vegetables and fruits are generous. It’s healthy as long as enough protein is consumed along with healthy fats. Cutting out fat altogether is not a good idea as your body requires some fat.

A typical dinner might include tofu marinade in ginger, garlic, lemon juice, and sesame oil and then stir fried with vegetables and served over brown rice.

**Vegan**

One step more extreme than vegetarian is the vegan diet. All animal products are excluded which means no dairy, no yogurt, eggs, cheeses or milk. Some vegans say that honey isn’t acceptable because it’s produced by bees which are animals.

A vegan diet presents a number of challenges. Some vegans won’t eat in a restaurant that isn’t completely vegan because of possible cross contamination by animal products being served to other customer.

Another challenge is making sure enough protein is consumed.

**Raw**

All foods are processed without being exposed to heat over 118 degrees F. A good dehydrator can be used if it has temperature controls. The rational is that high temperatures destroy vitamins minerals and antioxidants. The diet is mostly plant based including grains. Some proponents allow dairy. However the dairy products can not be pasteurized which means being exposed to high heat to kill off bacteria. If you can find raw milk you could make your own yogurt, since the process includes heating the milk to about 100 degrees and then cooling.

Foods that have the words toasted, dry-roasted, baked or cooked on the label are not raw. Canned foods are processed at high heat so aren’t considered raw. Frozen foods are blanched in boiling water so are not raw.

Consuming raw meat can lead to illness if the meat is not scrupulously clean. Fish should be sushi grade. Chicken is out of the question.

A raw food diet is both easy and difficult. Eating nothing but raw fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds can get boring. Eating out relies on mostly salads. The difficulty is that preparing raw foods in an interesting manner is time consuming.

**Low Calorie**

Simply put this diet works because you consume less calories than your body requires, so it turns to burning fat. It’s probably the most accepted diet to lose weight. A pound of body fat is 3000 calories. To lose a pound of fat you cut your daily consumption by 100 calories and in a month that pound of fat is gone. If you want to lose weight faster cut up to 750 calories a day. The average person consumes an average of 2000 calories per day.

You might think a starvation diet, say 750 calories a day, would help you lose weight faster. And it does – in the beginning. However, your body starts lowering your metabolism in reaction to that starvation diet. It becomes more difficult to lose weight.

Low calorie is probably the least restrictive diet for losing weight as no foods are forbidden. If you overeat one day you can get back to your program the next day.

**High Protein**

Not a difficult concept. You consume lots of protein and severely limit carbohydrates. It’s not dangerous in the short term but could result in vitamin deficiencies in the long run. It could also cause problems in people with kidney problems. If high cholesterol is one of your problems a high protein diet based on high fat red meat could aggravate your cholesterol.

**Intermittent Fasting**

Your body starts to decrease your metabolism when you drop your calorie consumption too low for too long a period. What seems to be a contradiction to this is the program called Intermittent Fasting.

You are severely limiting calories in programs one and three but your body doesn’t have a chance to react and slow your metabolism. Additionally fasting gives your digestion system a chance to rest in all three programs. Theoretically this rest clears out toxins as well.

1. Sixteen Hour Fast

Consume all foods within an eight hour period. Fast the remaining 16 hours. It doesn’t matter which eight hour period. For example, your first meal is at 10:00 AM then the last time you eat would be before 6:00 PM. Eat one meal, three meals or snack all day long. What’s important is not consuming any calories for the 16 hour fast.

2. On Days and Off Days

Eat whatever you want for the off days. Fast on the On days which means no calorie consumption, just water or other no-calorie liquids. The on days can be consecutive or alternating. Whether you fast 2, 3 or 4 days per week depends on how fast you want to lose weight. Most people start with 2 on days per week, say Monday and Thursday. Eat normally on the off days.

3. Alternate very low calorie consumption days – less than 750 for men, and 500 for women – with days you eat normally. 500 calories isn’t much food. A meal of one chicken thigh, no skin, one cup of string beans and ½ cup of rice is 250 calories. Some proponents find it easier to consume a high protein smoothie for breakfast and dinner and just drink no calorie liquids the rest of the day.

**Keto**

The program was developed to treat seizures. A side benefit was weight loss. This is a fat-based program. 50 to 75% of calories consumed are from fats. Some experts say the fats should be healthy such as olive oil, others don’t differentiate. 10 to 25% of the calories are protein based and the remaining 15 to 25% from complex carbs. Carb consumption should be at less than 25 grams.

Because your body isn’t getting enough carbs to change into blood sugar so it starts burning fat, a state called ketosis. It’s a natural process.

The average diet is 2000 calories per day. So at 50% fat level 1000 calories are from fat. Under a Keto diet the equivalent of 10 tablespoons of butter should be consumed daily. Meat, cheese, full fat dairy such as our cream, cottage cheese, milk and yogurt are included.

Following a keto diet is a challenge if the other family members are not on the diet a well. The alternative is to add a complex carb dish to the menu for the others.

Before dismissing the keto diet, it does work for weight loss. Is it a long term diet? Some nutritionists say no because of the high level of fats. Others say that you can't consume enough vegetables to get all the vitamins, minerals and micronutrients necessary and keep the carb count below 25 grams. One cup of cooked kale is 6 grams.

**Mindful Eating**

It simply means that you are aware of and savor every bite of food. If you do that, focus on the food, the texture, the aroma and taste you are satisfied with less and lose weight. It does make sense since there is a tendency to eat food quickly. There are no restrictions or foods that you must eat.

You learn what triggers food cravings by focusing on your emotions and feelings. You eat until you’re full but no more. You learn to distinguish when you’re really hungry rather than bored, anxious or even thirsty. You appreciate the food and consume it without guilt.