

Navigating Diet Patterns

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Popular diets come and go, but the question remains - which diet is best for *your* health? The answer remains: the one you can stick with in the long run. But how do we determine which nutritional approach we're most likely to stick with? Asking yourself a few simple questions might help lead you to an answer:

1. Is the diet pattern **too restrictive**?
2. Does the diet pattern remove **entire food groups**?
3. Is the diet pattern **too complex to follow**?
4. Does the diet pattern negatively impact your **quality of life**?
5. Does it **negatively affect** your **mental wellbeing**?

If you answered YES to any one, or all, of these questions, that particular diet pattern is unlikely to be the best choice. You want to choose a diet pattern with more flexibility, one that invites foods from all macronutrient groups, and supports a positive relationship with food.

Still, you might find yourself overwhelmed with all of the buzz about different diets and which is best to follow or not follow. Let's break down some of the most common diet patterns and discuss what they are, and what to consider.

Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean diet isn't a diet, per se, but an eating pattern. This pattern or way of eating encourages choosing healthy fats (predominantly omega-3 fatty acids), is incredibly plant-forward (think veggies, fruits, beans, legumes, whole grains), promotes modest amounts of fish and dairy, while limiting consumption of red meat, alcohol and simple and refined carbohydrate food sources. Research shows that following a Mediterranean diet can reduce the risk for many metabolic and pro-inflammatory conditions such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, to name a few.

Low Carbohydrate Diets

Low carbohydrate (or "carb") diets have been promoted for decades and have taken many different names and forms. Ultimately, reduced carbohydrate diets may support metabolic improvements such as tightened blood sugar control, improved insulin sensitivity and steady weight loss. Often low carbohydrate diets promote the removal of carbohydrate foods rich in fiber and other important nutrients without replacement, which is why **carb quality** is also an important area of focus. Intense restriction of carbohydrates may lead to challenges with long

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term adherence. And ultimately the fast reintroduction of carbohydrates can lead to weight regain.

In other words, a very low carb diet, and can be hard to stick to for prolonged periods. If a modest reduction in carbohydrates is part of your personal goals and/or care plan, your Care Team is here to help support you.

Plant-based Diets

Eating a diet that is mostly composed of plants is recommended for many different reasons, including the health benefits of eating enough fiber, polyphenol food sources, prebiotic foods, to name a few. While many studies have compared a total vegetarian diet (or vegan diet) to an omnivore diet (or diet including animal foods), choosing to remove all animal based products is more of a personal choice than it is mandatory to see positive results when it comes to your health. Simply eating more plants could be one of your goals, but if you choose to follow a totally plant-based diet, your registered dietitian is here to help ensure you're meeting all of your nutrient goals.

Very Low Calorie Diets

Very low calorie diets (or VLCD) often include an extreme calorie restriction while under medical supervision. Part of the plan typically includes nutritional meal replacements in order to meet the limited amount of calories allowed. This diet plan is very short term, and often involves a transition back to healthful eating. Nevertheless, this approach may not be helpful long term as many people struggle to transition back to food from meal replacements.

In summary, the diet pattern that works best is the diet pattern you can stick to!

There isn't any one specific diet that's THE best. We are all individuals, and therefore we all have vast differences when it comes to diet, exercise and other changes in habits necessary to support our health goals. Just remember, making small changes can lead to big improvements! You may discover that the small changes you make are really bits and pieces of different diet patterns which all lead to your overall goal: better health for the long-term. With the help and support of your Care Team, we'll find the parts that work best for you!

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