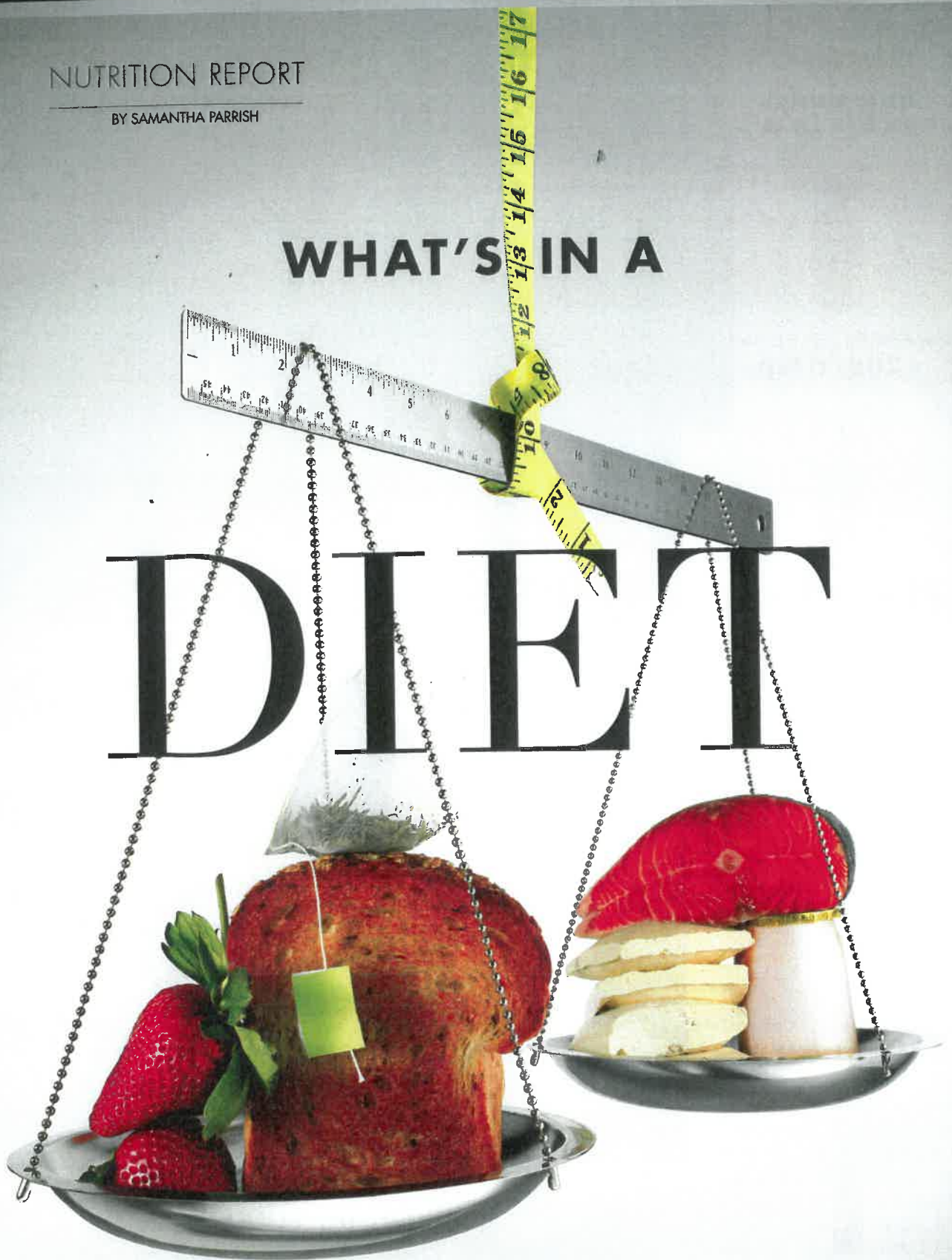


NUTRITION REPORT

BY SAMANTHA PARRISH

WHAT'S IN A

DIET



Understanding the science (or not) behind some of today's popular diets will ensure that you are better informed when making your decision.

ut this out, try this, eat more of that, drink less of this, cook this way, don't do that, do this.

There are so many diets out there claiming to give you that illusive perfect beach body, but while some may give you the results you are looking for in a short period of time, they are not sustainable (or healthy). Ideally, you should aim to integrate a sustainable way of healthy eating into your daily life, to support your body, your mind and your overall health.

Ultimately, we are all unique – what works for one person may not necessarily work for another. We have taken a selection of popular diets and looked at the science and research (or lack thereof) behind them. We have also included the opinions, personal and professional, of experts in the field of healthy eating and weight loss so that you can make your own informed decision.

IDEALLY, YOU SHOULD AIM TO INTEGRATE A SUSTAINABLE WAY OF HEALTHY EATING INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE, TO SUPPORT YOUR BODY, YOUR MIND AND YOUR OVERALL HEALTH

THE BLOOD TYPE DIET

WHAT IS IT?

The Blood Type diet, which was created by naturopath Peter J D'Adamo, claims that the foods we eat react chemically with our blood type, and that we should tailor our diet according to that blood type. D'Adamo suggests the following diets for each blood type:

Type O blood – should look at a high-protein diet heavy on lean meat, poultry, fish and vegetables, and light on grains, beans and dairy.

Type A blood – should look at a meat-free diet based on fruits, vegetables, beans, legumes and whole grains as the base, with a focus on organic and fresh foods, as those with type A blood have weaker immune systems.

Type B blood – should avoid corn, wheat, buckwheat, lentils, tomatoes, peanuts and sesame seeds. He says chicken can be problematic. He encourages eating green vegetables, eggs, certain meats and low-fat dairy.

Type AB blood – should focus on including tofu, seafood, dairy and green vegetables. He says people with AB blood tend to have low stomach acid, so should avoid alcohol as well as smoked and cured meats.

23%

THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN WHO REPORT HAVING BEEN ON A DIET OF SOME SORT WITH IN THE LAST YEAR

SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING

There have not been any specific studies done on the success of the blood type diet, but there have been case studies of people saying the diet has worked for them. However, it is believed the success of this type of diet has more to do with the fact that individuals will be cutting out certain foods that cause excess weight gain, and less to do with their blood type. There has been one study that found that people with certain blood types got more of a cholesterol-lowering benefit from eating a low-fat diet, but there was no proof that the concept of blood type played a pertinent role.

While the diet can work for some, it has been said in numerous reports and papers that this type of diet, where so many food groups are cut out, cannot be sustained over a long period of time.

PROFESSIONAL OPINION

Says Melissa Kelly, registered dietician and one of the Well Up expert panel: "The blood group diet shows results of weight loss for the mere fact that every blood group will change their dietary intake, and by eliminating certain foods, such as wheat, dairy or meat, you will see changes in your weight and health."

BANTING (LOW-CARB, HIGH-PROTEIN)

WHAT IS IT?

Banting, which is also known as the low-carb, high-protein diet, has been at the centre of much debate. The low-carb, high-protein diet that has been widely promoted by Professor Tim Noakes refers to a diet where there is a massive reduction in the amount of carbohydrates that are consumed, and the amount of protein in your diet is increased to make up for this reduction.

Experts in the field of nutrition have been arguing that healthy, sustainable weight loss is achieved through finding balance in the intake of protein, fats and carbohydrates, instead of drastically decreasing the intake of one food group. The argument is that this is a unrealistic way to plan your eating, as individuals with high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, obesity and high cholesterol should not be eating large amounts of protein.

SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING

A recent systematic review, issued by the Association for Dietetics in South Africa, Chronic Disease Initiative for Africa, Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa, the Nutrition Society of South Africa and Professional Board for Dietetics and Nutrition of the HPCSA, combining the findings of 19 clinical trials, found that low-carbohydrate diets result in similar weight losses over two years as diets containing a recommended balance of carbohydrate, fat and protein. This review included overweight and obese people with and without diabetes.

The results showed that little or no difference was detected for known heart disease and diabetes risk factors over two years.

The study found that the reduction of energy, not necessarily found only in carbohydrates, led to an increase in weight loss over time. It also showed that drastically cutting back carbohydrate intake will give you short-term success in terms of weight loss, but that this might not be effective in keeping that weight off.

Another one of the fundamental results of the review was that weight loss in itself improves risk factors of heart disease and diabetes, and that this is not simply due to a cut-back in the amount of carbs you eat.

PROFESSIONAL OPINION

"The initial fast weight loss associated with Banting can drive motivation, and studies have shown that it may result in more weight loss and better improvements in blood lipid and glucose levels when compared to six months of conventional dieting. However, when compared at 12 and 24 months, these differences fall away," says registered dietician Celynn Erasmus.

She explains that this type of dieting, where you severely cut your carbohydrate intake, can result in ketosis. "Ketosis occurs when you don't have enough sugar (glucose) for energy, so your body breaks down stored fat, causing ketones to build up in your body, which can lead to nausea, headaches, mental fatigue and bad breath," she explains.

She also warns that high protein consumption in individuals who are obese or suffer from cardiovascular disease, diabetes, osteoporosis, excessive iron stores and kidney problems can produce dangerous side effects on this kind of diet.



PALEO DIET

WHAT IS IT?

The Paleo diet, also known as the caveman diet, refers to the simplest form of eating there is. Back in the day, cavemen had to eat whatever they could hunt or collect from their surroundings, and this is the basis of the Paleo diet.

The diet looks to incorporate lean proteins, fruits and vegetables, and healthy fats from nuts, seeds, avocados, olive oil and fish oil. The lean proteins support strong muscles, healthy bones and optimal immune function, whereas the fruits and vegetables are rich in antioxidants, vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients.

SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING

Research has shown that one of the greatest deviations away from our ancestral diet is the amount and type of fat found in modern grain-fed animals vs grass-fed or wild meat, fowl and fish. Wild meat is remarkably lean and has relatively low amounts of saturated fats, while supplying significant amounts of beneficial omega-3 fats, such as EPA and DHA.

Scientific research and epidemiological studies show that diets such as the Paleo diet which are rich in monounsaturated and omega-3 fats dramatically reduce the instances of obesity, cancer, diabetes, heart disease and cognitive decline. However, with it being extremely difficult, and often expensive, to get one's hands on hormone-free, grass-fed meat and organic fruit and vegetables, the Paleo diet is one that would be difficult to implement over a long period of time, not making it very sustainable.

PROFESSIONAL OPINION

Kelly explains that the Paleo diet is one in which the food pyramid is shifted, by removing grains, legumes and dairy. "In dietetic terms, any diet or eating plan that eliminates a food group altogether is flagged as a fad diet," she says. This is due to the fact that you do not need to cut out a certain type of food completely, but rather control portion sizes as a way of making it a more realistic way to live your life.

"The nutritional risk you run when limiting your carbohydrate choices to a few options is a deficiency of B-vitamins, fibre and carbohydrates," Kelly says. "The recommended dietary allowance for carbohydrates is 130g per day, which equates to 25g every three hours." Cutting carbohydrate intake to less than the daily recommendation may cause initial euphoria, until, over time, the food cravings, moody behaviour, irritated bowel and skin problems all become evidence of the fact that the body now has to cope with running on fat, rather than carbohydrates, as fuel.



VEGETARIAN DIET

WHAT IS IT?

While many people think a vegetarian diet is not a sustainable, healthy way to fuel your body, studies have shown that if you take enough care when it comes to the nutrients and minerals you might miss out on, becoming a vegetarian can be beneficial to your long-term health and wellness.

Cholesterol levels and blood pressure have been proven to be much lower in vegetarians than in meat-eaters, which is one of the major health benefits to a diet based around fruits, vegetables, whole grains and healthy fats such as nuts and seeds. Vegetarian eating can also be used as a way to cleanse your body every now and then.

It is important to chat to a nutrition expert to find out the best ways to create balance in a diet that cuts out meat, which is a major source of protein.

SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING

Numerous scientific studies have shown the benefits that arise from a vegetarian diet, with lower intake of saturated fats being at the foreground of most of these studies. Higher intakes of complex carbohydrates, dietary fibre, magnesium, folic acid, vitamin C and E, carotenoids and other phytochemicals are also some of the advantages of a diet rich in earth-grown goodness.

According to the US National Library of Medicine, a decrease in saturated fats leads to a decrease in the risk of obesity, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, renal disease, dementia and arthritis.

PROFESSIONAL OPINION

"Vegetarian diets, if well-planned, are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood and adolescence," says Kelly. "And vegan diets, which exclude any kind of meat and animal byproducts, can also have benefits, but key nutrients, such as protein, n-3 fatty acids, iron, zinc, calcium and vitamins D and B-12 need to be monitored carefully."

She explains that if you ensure that you are taking in enough of these important substances, a vegetarian or vegan diet can be very beneficial to your health.

LOW-FAT DIET

WHAT IS IT?

A low-fat diet is one in which the fat content in a person's daily diet is significantly reduced and a focus is placed on including more good-quality, complex carbohydrates. The general rule of thumb says that if you want to lose weight, you need to eat fewer calories per day than you burn off while exercising. Foods which are high in fat contain a lot of calories, so cutting down on fatty foods is one way to ensure weight loss.

A diet that focuses on fat reduction can be beneficial, but can also lead to a deficiency of important fats, such as omega-3 and 6. The best way to ensure that you cut down your energy consumption is to cut out the bad fats, such as trans fats found in processed foods, and include more of the good fats, such as unsaturated fats that are found in oily fish like salmon, tuna, pilchards and sardines, as well as nuts, and olive, rapeseed and sunflower oil.

While some foods are low in fat, they can still be high in sugar, salt and starch, so it is important to make note of this too. This kind of diet is said to significantly reduce the risk of diseases such as heart disease and different types of cancer, including breast cancer, and reduce the incidence of obesity.

95%

OF ALL SOUTH AFRICAN SURVEYED BY NESTLÉ SOUTH AFRICA LISTED DAIRY AS THE TOP FOOD GROUP THEY CONSUMED DAILY (OVER AND ABOVE FRUIT, RED MEAT, EGGS AND STARCHES)



SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING

The Women's Health Initiative was started by the National Institute of Health in 1991, and part of the study was to look at whether or not a low-fat diet would reduce the risk of obesity, cardiovascular disease and cancer. The study subjects were 48 835 post-menopausal women, randomised to a low-fat group or a control group. The low-fat group was instructed to eat less fat and increase their consumption of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. After a period of seven-and-a-half to eight years, the low-fat group weighed only 0,4 kg less than the control group, and there was no difference in the incidences of cardiovascular disease or different types of cancer.

Another study, referred to as the Action for Health in Diabetes, was an intensive lifestyle intervention study in Type-2 diabetes patients, aimed at reducing the rate of cancer, heart attacks and stroke. This study did show weight loss by intense calorie restriction and increased physical activity, and found that after nine-and-a-half years, the intervention group managed to lower their weight by 6%, compared to 3,5% in the control group.

Numerous studies have shown that a low-fat diet can work for short-term weight loss, but consideration needs to be given to the insufficient levels of important fats in the body.

PROFESSIONAL OPINION

Erasmus explains that the low-fat diet helps to achieve an energy deficit, as fats are energy-dense, with 1g fat = 38kJ vs 1g protein = 17kJ. "Incorporating a low-fat eating plan into your life can help to shed excess weight, which in turn will lead to you lowering your chances of cardiovascular disease and diabetes," she says. "It also encourages people to shift their mindset away from eating foods that are higher in fat and focus on incorporating more foods such as fruits, vegetables and beans into their diet."

However, Erasmus warns that people need to remember that some "lower-fat" foods could still be very high in sugar, salt and starch, and very low in important nutrients. "It is also crucial to remember that if the carbohydrates chosen in place of fat are highly processed or refined, weight-loss efforts will be sabotaged, and the risk of heart disease and diabetes might increase," she says.

JUICING

WHAT IS IT?

Juicing is a relatively hot topic in the world of nutrition and dieting at the moment; it has become very popular all over the world, either as a detox or as a way to add important nutrients, vitamins and minerals into your daily diet.

Many people use freshly squeezed juices, normally made with fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices, as a meal replacement or simply as a delicious, healthy drink once a day. One way to detox using juicing is to drink only freshly made juices for a week, with no additional food consumption. Because the juices are made using fresh fruits and vegetables, you are able to get enough fibre, nutrients, minerals and vitamins from the juice you are drinking over the week. The idea of this detox is to cleanse your body of all unwanted nasties such as salt and sugar.

While the concept of juicing is great, it is not a healthy, realistic, long-term solution to weight loss, but rather a quick fix to give your body a nice boost every now and then.

SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING

Registered dietician for The Mayo Clinic, Jennifer Nelson, says juicing is probably not any healthier than eating whole fruits and vegetables. "Juicing extracts the liquids from fresh fruits and vegetables, and the liquid contains most of the vitamins, minerals and plant chemicals found in the whole fruit," says Nelson. "But fruits and vegetables also contain healthy fibre, which is lost in the juicing process."

Some experts in nutrition believe juicing is more beneficial because the juice is able to absorb into the body more quickly than the whole fruit or vegetable, but there has been no sound scientific evidence to suggest that extracted juices are healthier than the juice you get from eating the fruit or vegetable.

PROFESSIONAL OPINION

"Although a juicing diet can act as an excellent detox and maintain blood-sugar levels in the short term, it should only be a short-term intervention when it comes to your health," says Kelly. Fruit and vegetable juices always contain carbohydrates in different amounts, depending on what you use. When drinking juices, you should account for the carbohydrate content, and it is for this reason that a diabetic should take caution when replacing food with juice.

While juicing is an excellent way to cleanse your body of sugar and other impurities, it is not a sustainable solution to weight loss.

THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET

WHAT IS IT?

The Mediterranean diet is a heart-healthy plan that focuses on incorporating fruits, vegetables, beans, legumes, seeds, nuts, herbs, spices and olive oil into your diet. Originating in Greece, it consists of a typical pyramid with nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetables, grains and healthy fats at the bottom; fish and seafood on the next level; poultry, eggs, cheese and dairy on the next; and lastly meat and sweets on the top tier. The focus of the Mediterranean diet isn't on limiting total fat consumption, but rather on choosing healthier types of fat. It discourages saturated fats and trans fats, both of which contribute to heart disease and other non-communicable diseases.

SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING

Recent research published by The Mayo Clinic has shown that the traditional Mediterranean diet reduces the risk of heart disease by a good margin. In fact, an analysis of more than 1.5 million healthy adults demonstrated that following a Mediterranean way of eating was associated with a reduced risk of death from heart disease and cancer, as well as a reduced incidence of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases, possibly due to the inclusion of healthy omega fats.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends the Mediterranean diet as an eating plan that can promote health and prevent disease. And the Mediterranean diet is one your whole family can follow for good health.

PROFESSIONAL OPINION

According to Kelly, founder of Scoop to Lose, the Mediterranean diet is in line with every sound nutritional opinion there is. "The eating plan promotes long-term weight loss and better health, and allows you to eat your favourite foods in moderation," she says.

Because the diet includes food groups such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and low-fat or fat-free dairy products, you are able to have sustained weight loss and health over a longer period of time, in comparison with quick-fix, fad diets.

Registered dietician Celynn Erasmus adds that the Mediterranean diet is a great way to ensure you increase your nutrient intake, as well as reduce your chances of suffering from a chronic disease. ■

NUTRITION REPORT

THE FAST DIET

WHAT IS IT?

The Fast diet, also known as the 5:2 diet, is one of the newest trends to hit the dieting scene. The basic principle of this diet is to eat normally for five days and semi-fast for two days of the week. The authors of the book *The Fast Diet: The Secret of Intermittent Fasting – Lose Weight, Stay Healthy, Live Longer*, Dr Michael Mosley and Mimi Spencer, explain that the Fast diet is so popular because it is very easy to follow, with no calorie counting, cutting whole food groups or intricate guidelines.

The diet requires users to restrict their energy intake on two days of the week (preferably on Mondays and Thursdays) to 500kcal, or 2 100k, a day for women and 600 kcal, or 2 500kJ, a day for men. Although the Fast diet is relatively easy to follow, it is clear that it is not something that can be adopted for a long period of time, but rather over a few months or until desired results are seen, which makes it a fad diet.

SCIENTIFICALLY SPEAKING

In his book, Mosley explains that there is a science behind fasting and this has to do with the fact that when we eat foods packed with carbs, or high in sugar and starches, it causes our blood glucose levels to rise. Our body produces the hormone insulin as a reaction to eating, to keep our glucose from going way up or way down. It does this by taking some glucose out of the blood and storing it as glycogen in the liver.

Insulin also encourages fat cells to take up fatty acids and store them, the way it encourages liver cells to take up sugars and store them. Studies have shown that intermittent fasting boosts the effectiveness of insulin to store glucose and break down fats, something called insulin sensitivity. "Increased insulin sensitivity will reduce your risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cognitive decline," Mosley explains.

PROFESSIONAL OPINION

While the diet may seem easy enough to follow, studies have shown that patients with reactive hypoglycaemia, diabetes (particularly Type-1 diabetes), pregnant women, very active individuals and anyone with a tendency or past history of eating disorders should not use fasting as a means of losing weight.

According to Dr Ingrid van Heerden from DietDoc, a recent study has also shown that individuals who fast may automatically ingest too little liquid, as food contains relatively large amounts of liquid, which can lead to dehydration on days of fasting. "While fasting is an accepted practice in many of the world's great religions, the new Fast diet craze may well induce individuals who should not be fasting, for medical reasons, to this practice, and this could lead to negative health implications," she says. ■

While the topic of dieting is one that will never die down, Melissa Kelly explains that reducing energy intake remains the target to bring your weight down, and sometimes even fad diets succeed at jolting you from the grind of mindless snacking, eating junk food on the run, and all the calorie and fat-packed extras such as whipped cream in the cappuccino, or grabbing a slice of pizza on the way home from work. Just making these lifestyle adjustments is usually enough to see some weight loss.

"However, while you are reaping the benefits of your new quick weight-loss plan, you have to consider its overall nutritional makeup," Kelly says. "The fact that the diet resulted in quick weight loss without meeting your nutritional needs can lead to your regaining weight rapidly if you revert to your old eating habits, and, ultimately, yo-yo dieting." She says it is important to make sure that the plan you choose does not set you up for failure, and that the most important question about any weight-loss plan is not whether it is effective, but whether it's safe and healthy for you.

