



Health-Full Eating & Nutrition



How to Safely Try a New Diet

Introduction

During a time of year that many of us may be trying to lose weight, the possibility of trying a new diet is a thought that has crossed many of our minds. We often see commercials, internet articles, videos, and news segments that attempt to sell us on a myriad of dieting trends. From vegetarian to paleo, high-protein to low-carb, there are more options than what we know to do with. This does beg the question, however, “How do I safely try a new diet?” That will be the topic of today’s article, so continue reading to find out more!

First, in order to address as many diets as possible, I’m going to classify them into various categories. These categories include: **proportion diets**, **lifestyle changes**, and **exclusion/minimalism** diets. However, before I go any further, I want to make it very clear that anyone with any underlying health condition(s) should consult (at a minimum) their primary-care physician before attempting a new diet or food-related lifestyle-change. Additionally, it may be a good idea to also consult with a registered dietitian (RD or RDN). Even for those with no underlying health conditions it is highly recommended you consult your doctor before making a change.

Proportion Diets: This first grouping of diets consists of those that only seek to decrease the overall proportion of food one eats, rather than significantly decrease or eliminate any specific foods or food groups. Another common term of these styles of dieting is “calories in vs calories out” or “everything in moderation.” In regards to long-term success, this style tends to do rather well and is relatively safe. It is also a very easy transition on the body, meaning acclimation comes quicker and you may fully adopt (7 days/week) this style after only 1-3 weeks of transitioning. Still, if you’re an individual with an underlying condition, it’s recommended you speak with a physician before decreasing the amount of food you eat.

Lifestyle Changes: As the name implies, these “lifestyle changing” diets are those that significantly alter the lifestyle of individuals who attempt them. Specific examples often include names of diets that end in “-ism,” such as vegetarianism, veganism, and pescatarianism. Another example is the Mediterranean diet. The underlying focus of these diets is to alter the overall way we eat by focusing on the whole dietary picture.

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(Lifestyle Changes continued)

They seek to reduce the amount of processed foods and red meats (or even eliminate if possible), and focus on whole foods, lots of veggies, greens, fruits, and quality plant-based food sources. All of these diets have been deemed relatively safe. If one wishes to make the switch, it's recommended you follow your new guidelines for one or two days a week, and slowly increase the days of adherence over the course of 2-6 months. This slow transition makes it easier on the body and gives you a chance to acclimate to dietary differences you encounter.

Exclusion Diets: These diet variations, again as the name implies, greatly limit or outright exclude one (or more) of the three primary macronutrients (carbs, fat, protein). Individuals are typically advised against these diets, as they have been found to be either non-sustainable or potentially harmful to the body. Examples include Atkins and Keto (both greatly limit carbohydrates intake) or any other "low carb" diet, as well as most "low fat" diets. If you truly wish to attempt any of these diets, you need to first consult your physician and they will provide further instruction. If given the "all-clear" from your doctor, taking a similar approach to the previous category is also a good idea. One day per week, slowly increasing as your body acclimates. Please also be aware that when it comes to your total daily calories, it's recommended 45-65% come from carbohydrates, 10-35% come from protein, and 20-35% come from fat. Any diet that causes you to dip below the minimum recommended amounts is likely an "exclusion diet," and is recommended that you take a conservative approach WITH a doctor's guidance.

Take Home Message: The common theme of how to tackle each of these different styles/groupings of dieting is rather simple: acclimate slowly over a period of time rather than "jump into the deep end." Additionally, when it comes to diets that are "exclusionary," it is essentially a requisite that you speak with your doctor; these diets may have a negative impact on your health and do not tend to be sustainable. At the end of the day, diets that implement more of a lifestyle change or a simple decrease in the overall proportion of food you eat tend to be the safest and most successful. Finally, please remember that it is always recommended you consult with your primary care physician before making significant dietary changes.



References:

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