

# Health tip: Popular diets — myths and facts

Food is an important contributor to our overall health. Eating a balanced, nutrient-rich diet may help prevent, delay, and manage chronic diseases like heart disease and type 2 diabetes.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, popular diets promise quick weight loss and a healthier, happier you. Many of these diets have short-term benefits, but they also have long-term risks. It is important to understand fact from fiction when choosing the best food for your body.

## Ketogenic Diet

The “keto diet” is a high-fat, low-carb diet that puts the body into a state of ketosis, where the body breaks down fat for energy.

**Myth:** High-fat foods contain all the nutrients the body needs to survive, and there are no health risks involved with this diet.

**Fact:** The Ketogenic diet eliminates many high-fiber vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, making it low in essential vitamins, minerals, and fibers. The keto diet may be helpful for people with certain diseases like epilepsy, but the long-term health risks of following this diet are unknown.<sup>3</sup>

## Paleo Diet

The Paleo diet, low in carbohydrates and rich in meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds, mimics what may have been eaten during the Paleolithic era.

**Myth:** The paleo diet covers all necessary food groups.

**Fact:** Studies show that the paleo diet may help lower blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglycerides. However, this diet is missing important nutrients from carbohydrates, like fiber.<sup>4</sup>

## Plant-Based Diet

The plant-based diet consists of getting all or most of your calories from fresh, whole foods that are minimally processed.

**Myth:** You cannot get the necessary amount of protein, carbohydrates, and fats from a plant-based diet.

## Fact

The USDA’s 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend four tips for healthy eating<sup>2</sup>:

1. Follow a healthy dietary pattern at every life stage
2. Customize and enjoy nutrient-dense food and beverage choices to reflect personal preferences, cultural traditions, and budgetary considerations
3. Focus on meeting food group needs with nutrient-dense foods and beverages, and stay within calorie limits
4. Limit foods and beverages higher in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium, and limit alcoholic beverages

**Fact:** Many people supplement plant-based diets with eggs, dairy and some meat. Individuals following a vegetarian diet may need to supplement with Vitamin B-12.<sup>5</sup>

---

## My Plate

MyPlate.gov is a tool offered by the USDA that suggests what a healthier plate might look like. MyPlate.gov encourages healthier portions of fruits, vegetables, proteins, grains, and dairy.

**Myth:** It is impossible to customize one's food choices using MyPlate.

**Fact:** The MyPlate template encourages choosing healthier foods that meet your individual needs.<sup>6</sup>

---

## Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean diet is rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds, olive oil, fish, herbs, spices, low-fat dairy, and limited red meat.

**Myth:** There are no health benefits to eating the Mediterranean diet.

**Fact:** The Mediterranean diet is the only diet that has consistently proven to lower the risk of cardiovascular disease over time.<sup>7</sup>

---

## DASH Diet

The DASH diet stands for "Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension." It is a flexible eating plan that focuses on eating appropriate servings of grains, meats, poultry, fish, fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy, fats and oils, and sodium with the goal of improving heart health and lowering blood pressure.

**Myth:** The DASH diet is restrictive and does not allow for variety.

**Fact:** Each person's DASH diet plan will look different. Using the DASH framework helps build meals that are best suited to individual wants and preferences.<sup>8</sup>

---

## Intermittent Fasting

Intermittent Fasting is an eating pattern that cycles between periods of fasting and eating. Common intermittent fasting methods involve daily 16-hour fasts or fasting for 24 hours, two times per week.

**Myth:** Intermittent fasting is a quick way to lose weight and increase your metabolism.

**Fact:** Intermittent fasting may be one component of living a healthier lifestyle. People who are pregnant, breast feeding, or managing chronic conditions like heart disease or diabetes should talk to their healthcare provider before trying this method.<sup>9</sup>

---



### Sources:

1. CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/chronic-disease/prevention/index.html>. 2024. Accessed October 2024.
2. USDA. [https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary\\_Guidelines\\_for\\_Americans\\_2020-2025.pdf](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/sites/default/files/2020-12/Dietary_Guidelines_for_Americans_2020-2025.pdf). 2020. Accessed October 2024.
3. Harvard Health. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/should-you-try-the-keto-diet>. 2024. Accessed October 2024.
4. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/paleo-diet/art-20111182>. 2024. Accessed October 2024.
5. Harvard Health. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-a-plant-based-diet-and-why-should-you-try-it-2018092614760>. 2024. Accessed October 2024.
6. USDA. <https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/what-is-myplate>. 2024. Accessed October 2024.
7. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/mediterranean-diet/art-20047801>. 2023. Accessed October 2024.
8. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/dash-diet/art-20048456>. 2023. Accessed October 2024.
9. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/expert-answers/intermittent-fasting/faq-20441303>. 2022. Accessed October 2024.