

# Nutrition Advice: What to Believe?

We know how important what we eat is to our health. So, it is little wonder that we continually try the newest nutrition trends. **For example:**

- Have you ever adopted the same diet as a movie star, only to find that it didn't work as well for you as it supposedly did for her?
- Do you tend to go along with the latest diet fad—whether it's low-fat, low-carb or high-protein—only to give up and go back to your regular eating habits?
- Do you have a mental list of "good foods" that you try to eat regularly and "bad foods" that you feel guilty eating?
- Do you try to avoid an entire food group to lose weight or for other reasons?
- Do you take high doses of nutritional supplements, thinking if a little is good, more is better?

Some of these trends can be harmless, especially if they don't last long. However, following advice that is well intentioned but not appropriate to your specific needs can, in the long term, result in harmful consequences to your health.

## Here are some examples:

- **Following a low-fat** diet to lose weight—this was popular in the '80s and '90s—actually resulted in people consuming *more* calories and *gaining* weight. Low-fat diets can also lead to not enough "healthy" fats from avocados, nuts, fish and oils.
- **Avoiding or limiting foods**—in attempts to lose weight, lower fat intake, avoid animal products or for other reasons—can create a nutrient shortfall. For example, people who avoid milk and milk products may have a shortage of important nutrients that can lead to bone fractures in children and osteopenia or osteoporosis in adults.
- **Low-carbohydrate diets**—currently popular for weight loss—can lead to a diet low in fruit, whole grains and fiber, important nutrients that protect against cancer, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. Such diets may also lead to higher intakes of meat, cholesterol and fat, which can increase risk of heart disease.
- **Weight-loss diets** are now known to be linked to weight *gain*, with up to two-thirds of dieters regaining more weight than they originally lost. Dieting, in fact, predicts unhealthy eating behavior such as binge eating.
- **Taking dietary supplements** may provide nutritional "insurance"; however, supplements also pose some risk. Heavy supplement users may be getting too much of some nutrients. Supplements also do not provide all the healthy components of foods that scientists have yet to identify.

So ... what can you do to avoid these nutritional pitfalls? Before adopting any dietary advice, **assess the overall impact it will have on your health**, particularly in the long term. Turn over for some specific tips.

Focus on these 10 success tips:

1. Use **moderation, variety and balance** as key components of healthy eating. While these principles may not have the flair of popular diet regimens, they are “tried and true,” forming a sound foundation for diverse food choices that expand, not limit, your options.

2. Remember important factors in food choices, such as **taste, enjoyment and social and cultural factors**. Diets that do not consider these lifestyle factors will not be successful in the long term.

3. **Establish personal-health goals** and goals for your family. Remember that your needs and goals will be different from your co-workers, friends and neighbors.

4. Select foods from **all five food groups**. Remember that each food group provides important and unique nutrients.

6. **Choose nutrient-rich foods** whenever possible—foods that have a lot of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients. Examples from each food group are brightly colored fruits and 100 percent fruit juices; brightly colored vegetables and potatoes; whole, fortified and fiber-rich grains; low-fat and fat-free milk, cheese and yogurt; and lean meat, seafood, beans and nuts.

5. Avoid the common thinking that there are “**good foods**” and “**bad foods**.” In reality, all foods can be made a part of a healthy diet when eaten in moderation.

7. **Do not rely heavily on nutritional supplements**. Whole foods in their natural form should be the basis for your healthy, balanced diet.

8. Keep in mind that it is your **diet over time**, not individual foods or even single meals, that will ultimately affect your health.

9. **Track what you eat to help** you lose weight and keep it off. Use this food diary to help you monitor your choices and see where you can improve:  
[www.mealsmatter.org/diary](http://www.mealsmatter.org/diary).

10. **Visit a registered dietitian** for more in-depth nutrition advice or if you have specific questions and concerns. Nutrition websites such as [www.MealsMatter.org](http://www.MealsMatter.org) can also provide advice specific to your needs.