

Lifelong Health: Which diet is the best?

by *Dr_David_Lipschitz*

It's time to end the diet debate. Stop the nagging comparisons of Atkins vs. South Beach, fat vs. calories, and protein vs. carbohydrates. In a very carefully designed study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, researchers compared the weight loss of obese individuals on four different diets, and the results are quite clear. No matter the diet used, success depends on two important factors: consuming fewer calories and having a strong support network of meetings, weigh-ins and counseling.

In this particular study, participants followed a low-fat, normal-protein diet; a low-fat, high-protein diet; a high-fat, normal-protein diet; or a high-fat, high-protein diet. After one year, all four groups experienced roughly the same amount of weight loss, approximately 13.2 pounds. By year two, most dieters had regained some weight, but they were all still about 6.6 pounds lighter than they were before the study started.

In addition to pounds lost, researchers also examined quality of life, including how hungry the dieters were, their levels of satiety after eating, and satisfaction with the diet plans. In this area, all four groups had the same results. In every case, weight loss led to quantitative improvements in health, including reduced cholesterol levels and decreased "insulin resistance."

There are several important messages from this study. First, if you want to lose weight and keep it off, join a research study. Results are invariably better in research subjects than in average dieters. These dieters were monitored closely and were engaged constantly in the dieting process. For the average American dieter, the statistics are not encouraging. More than 95 percent of dieters tend to regain any lost weight, often becoming fatter than they were before beginning to diet.

Just as alcoholics and gamblers benefit from having sponsors and attending meetings, so, too, do overweight people need help if their diets are to succeed. So if you plan to diet, make sure you identify a counselor (usually a dietitian or nutritionist) and a support group that you can meet with frequently. Continued reinforcement, encouragement and weigh-ins are the best way to reach a target weight and keep it there.

Second, the most important predictor of weight gain or weight loss is not what you eat, but how much. Metabolically, when taking in fewer calories, the body must turn to its own fat and muscle for energy, which ultimately results in weight loss. It has been suggested that dieters who consume high-fat, low-carbohydrate diets develop satiety more rapidly and may experience decreased appetites because of accumulations of ketones. However, this study shows that satiety is equal regardless of the diet. Researchers directly correlated the amount of weight loss with the amount of food taken in – more food, more weight; less food, less weight.

This information simply strengthens my belief that the best diet is the Don't Diet! I like Michael Pollan's mantra: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." Simplify your relationship with food, and work on creating

the healthiest meal plan possible, always paying attention to portion sizes. Be prudent.

Reduce calorie intake by avoiding fatty foods and starches. For proteins, try to choose lean meat and fatty fish. For carbohydrates, seek the starches that are complex and rich in fiber.

Snack on fruits and vegetables. And always try to consume monounsaturated fats and omega-3 fatty acids instead of saturated fats or the highly processed trans fats. If eating out, skip the appetizer or take half your meal home. Eat slowly. That optimizes your chances of becoming satisfied and keeps you from overeating.

Finally, any healthy diet must be accompanied by exercise. Just go! The more exercise the better. Walk; raise your heart rate; and do not forget the importance of balance, stretching and resistance training.

Take some time to re-evaluate your diet plan; it's never too late to make healthier choices. Remember: Fewer calories plus more support equals less weight.

Dr. David Lipschitz is the author of the book "Breaking the Rules of Aging."

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