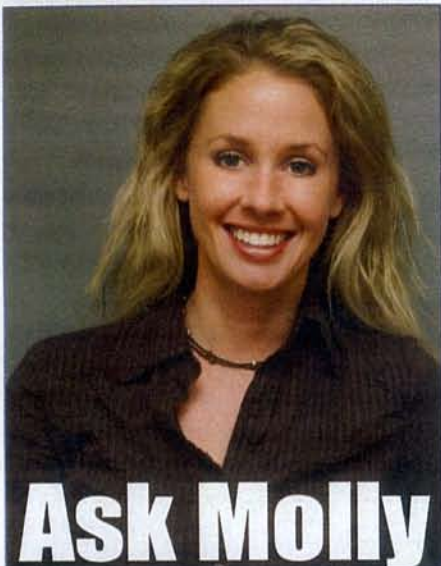


Fad Diets: Do they really work? You'd be surprised.

By Molly Kimball



Ask Molly

You've got questions? Our nutritionist, Molly Kimball, LDN, RD, has the answers.

March is National Nutrition Month. Sponsored by the American Dietetic Association, this year's theme is 100% Fad Free. It may not be the sexiest slogan, but they've got a point.

Diet fads come and go, and trendy-eating plans like low-carb or fat-free are just the beginning. There are also fasting diets, liquid diets, raw food diets, and even diets based on religious beliefs.

So, why do diet fads become so popular? It's because they can work. If you eliminate entire categories of food, stop drinking alcohol entirely, or drastically cut your caloric intake, you're sure to lose weight. That's a no-brainer. But more often than not, these are just quick-fix solutions. The weight loss will generally be temporary, only to be regained when you start eating normally again. The key with fads is being able to identify what's a questionable fad and what's actually worth looking into.

How to spot a sketchy diet trend

- It seems too good to be true. If a diet promises weight loss and added points to your IQ, then it's likely a gimmick!
- Watch out for diets that describe foods as good or bad. No food is innately bad—it's just how we choose to consume it that may be detrimental.
- Is the person or company trying to sell you their specific brand of supplements? If so, be cautious and ask yourself if they are looking out for your best interests or trying to make a buck.

If your goal is to incorporate better nutrition into your everyday lifestyle, consider meeting with a registered nutritionist. Dietitians know the science and art of nutrition, and they can translate the research into real-world living to fit your individual lifestyle and likes/dislikes when it comes to food. For more information, you can e-mail me at molly@livingneworleans.com

Q:

Dear Molly,

I am a very busy resident doctor who, like most of my peers, is not eating well at all. The long hours have me craving sweets, and once I do leave the hospital I find myself driving through fast food restaurants at all hours of the night.

How can I eat healthy when I'm having breakfast and other people are eating dinner?

—Adrian Negulescu - River Ridge

This is an issue I see often, particularly with professionals in the medical field who work long hours and shifts—some days, some nights.

The good news is that it is possible to make it through this without gaining 100 pounds, and without losing your sanity. The bad news is that it's not always going to be easy. It comes down to one thing: planning.

Eating something small every few hours is the best way to maintain metabolism and energy levels, so it's a good idea to keep snacks on hand. If you know you're not going to have time to sit down to a meal, at least you can grab a snack to keep blood-sugar levels sustained, and cravings at bay.

If you have a locker or designated space of your own, you can keep a stash of nonperishable snacks, so you don't have to remember to bring food with you every day. Try to pack foods that are high in protein and/or fiber. This will help keep you feeling fuller longer. And protein has been shown to help keep you alert as well. Some good options include nuts, peanut butter, whole grain crackers, beef jerky, protein bars and soy crisps.

If you have a fridge available, keep it stocked with grab-and-go snacks such as Lean Pockets, South Beach Pizza or Wrap Kits, low-sugar yogurt, hummus, and snack-size cheese.

As for when you do have time for a meal, the last thing you probably feel like doing is cooking or cleaning up. Obviously, this is what makes the drive-through so appealing after a long shift. Fortunately, fast food doesn't have to be a nutritional disaster. A single burger, cheeseburger, grilled chicken sandwich, or soft taco isn't that bad. It's the fried side items and sugary soft drinks that really kick up the artery-clogging and waist-thickening factor.

Even better, consider something like Subway, Quizno's, and Roly Poly that offer sandwiches or wraps on whole wheat bread. Wendy's chili is a pretty good bet, too. And, Smoothie King's High Protein Smoothies have enough protein to be considered a full meal. Not to mention, you can get a grilled chicken salad pretty much anywhere these days, as well.

Seek out the best options in your hospital's dining halls. The food may not be ideal, but buttery veggies are better than no veggies at all!

The bottom line? Plan ahead as much as possible. Keep snacks in your lab coat, your car, your desk or locker. Check out the fast food restaurants' Web sites and find the healthiest options at the places convenient for you.

Molly

Please write or email your questions or comments to molly@livingneworleans.com, we'd love to hear from you.