

Diet Comparisons

Approach	Common Names	What It's All About	Pros	Cons	The Bottom Line
Food Tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My Fitness Pal - Lose It - Spark People 	tracking calories (and other nutrients consumed) to ensure that one is consuming a caloric deficit in order to elicit weight loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - allows user to eat what they want, so long as it fits into their caloric goals - portable - easy to use (e.g., scanner tool allows you to scan foods for ease of entry) - free - extremely educational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - adherence to tracking may be difficult, especially when busy - some users report thinking excessively about food - some entries have errors - must be accurate in entering all items consumed and accurate quantities 	For many individuals looking to lose weight, this is an excellent place to start as it is very educational in teaching about what one is actually consuming. If you are not disciplined about tracking food every day or if you are not honest about what or how much you consume, this is doomed to fail.
Commercial Weight Loss Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weight Watchers - Jenny Craig - Medical Weight Loss - NutriSystem 	adhering to a prescribed diet using either (a) a specialty tracking system (e.g., Weight Watchers "Points" system) or (b) specialty food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - support groups and coaches - specialty diet foods may be more convenient (e.g., delivered, pre-packaged) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - low calorie foods may be more expensive - more difficult to eat out - does not necessarily facilitate a transfer to "normal" eating - specialty diet foods are not always "healthy" (e.g., unnatural ingredients, high sodium, etc.) 	For individuals who do not like to cook or don't have time and who want an approach that will be laid out for them, this may be a better approach. This is not for "foodies" or people who are required to travel frequently for work or pleasure as it requires specialty foods.
If It Fits Your Macros (IIFYM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - IIFYM 	advanced form of tracking that establishes very specific targets for calories, carbohydrates, protein, and fat, often used amongst bodybuilding/physique competitors/enthusiasts to eat more "normally" while still working toward a specific physique goal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - more freedom in eating - has been demonstrated to be effective in working toward physique goals while still maintaining a flexible approach to eating 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - may promote unhealthy food choices that fit one's macros - may result in a less than balanced diet (in the form of micronutrients) 	For individuals who have tried approaches such as "Clean Eating" that they felt were too restrictive, this approach may be a better fit, especially if they desire to compete in a physique show or at least look like they do.
Low-Carb	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - South Beach Diet - Atkins Diet 	reducing the number of carbohydrates in one's diet (e.g., starch, sugar, even fruit)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - quick weight loss - carbs are relatively easy to count - don't require counting calories - satisfying meats and fats - some users report feeling extremely energized after initial adjustment phase - effective for sedentary individuals who are not exercising - relatively easy to do in restaurants (e.g., meat and veggies) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - carbs in LOTS of food - may experience initial adjustment phase (e.g., similar to withdrawals from not having carbs) - may not be appropriate for athletic individuals who would benefit from more carbohydrates - cheating will take the body out of ketosis, inhibiting results - could be unhealthy if consuming excessive fats and cholesterol has been recommended against by doctor (e.g., cardiovascular concerns) 	For sedentary individuals who are looking for quick results, low-carb approaches can be very effective in that they force the body to use fat for fuel (vs. carbohydrate, its preferred source). This would not be recommended for athletes who require a greater source of carbohydrate. The individual should be committed to following the approach.
Low-Fat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ornish Diet - Pritikin Diet - most diets popularized in the 80s and 90s 	reducing the total number of fat grams in one's diet (e.g., fatty meats, oils, nuts), since they are high in calories and may be implicated in cardiovascular disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - allows for plenty of healthy fruits and vegetables, as well as nutritious starches and lean proteins - feel light - still get to eat carbs - may be helpful in improving blood lipids (e.g., cholesterol, triglycerides) and reducing likelihood of cardiovascular events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - must be careful not to eat excessive sugar and other calories that could still result in weight gain - similarly, can be unhealthy if the individual eats nutrient-poor foods such as those manufactured as "low-fat" with little nutritional value - may be more difficult in restaurants, although many now offer healthier options that are likely lower in fat - some report still feeling hungry after a meal, thus the importance of fiber - you still need fat, so no fat is not smart either 	For individuals who have experienced or are at risk for experiencing cardiovascular disease, this may be a beneficial approach in that it lowers fat and cholesterol from the diet.
Anti-Allergen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Virgin Diet - Gluten Free - Dairy Free - Soy Free - Basically "_____ Free" 	eliminating foods that could be causing allergenic symptoms in the body, thereby leading to bloating, gastrointestinal and other symptoms, and, in some cases, difficulty losing weight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - learn the root of a problem caused by food - potentially address underlying allergies and unwelcome symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the most difficult and restrictive diets to follow as one must eliminate at least one entire category of food - some require continued removal of the category, while others will allow for systematic reintroduction - challenging at some restaurants as this information may not be disclosed or accurate - certain media-popularized "bad" foods (e.g., wheat, gluten) are lacking research support for their role in weight gain/loss - "replacement foods" (e.g., gluten-free bread) may be less healthy than their "regular" counterparts 	This approach should only be considered if one actually suspects a food-related allergy/intolerance as research does <i>not</i> overwhelmingly support weight loss based on the simple removal of a nutrient. Instead, it is likely that individuals who have lost weight actually had an allergic/intolerance reaction to a food, or were reducing calories by taking the food(s) out.

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Meal Replacement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Slim Fast - Green Smoothie Diet 	replacing 1-2 meals per day with a nutrient-rich smoothie, and then eating one "sensible" meal per day (usually dinner)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - convenient and portable - fast - peer-reviewed research has demonstrated efficacy of "meal replacement" approaches <i>in general</i> (but <i>not</i> for specific approaches such as Green Smoothie Diet) - will likely generate quick results, especially in the beginning as calories are extremely controlled - special ingredients (e.g., fiber, appropriate amounts of fat) may help satiety - Green Smoothie-type ingredients are extremely healthy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - some plans may be difficult when traveling if they require actual blending - some individuals may find they get hungry quickly - this is variable - homemade Green Smoothies may be expensive as they require many ingredients - individuals with blood sugar issues should consult with their doctor and carefully monitor blood sugar using a plan with lots of fruit sugar - some plans will require a blender, which may be expensive and not always readily available 	For individuals who dislike cooking or meal preparation, or who are extremely busy but want to eat a "regular" meal each day, this may be a good approach. Feelings of hunger should be monitored for intensity, as well as performance and function. Additionally, using a balanced, whole foods-based shake is preferable to a prepackaged, chemical-laden one.
Clean Eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Eat Clean Diet - Mediterranean Diet - Paleo (variant) 	this approach emphasizes quality over quantity, choosing less processed foods, more fruits and vegetables, healthy whole grains, and lean meats; commonly combined with the mini-meal approach to eating (i.e., eating 5-6 mini-meals per day to balance blood sugar); often discussed in conjunction with organic, local, seasonal, non-GMO, hormone-free, and free-range; Paleo is a cross between low-carb and clean eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - emphasizes quality of ingredients over counting/tracking - probably the healthiest approach listed here, since the emphasis is on eliminating/greatly reducing processed foods - "clean" versions of many traditional foods exist and are readily available in cookbooks and online - lifestyle that will facilitate improved health (e.g., blood chemistry) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - requires lots of preparation and cooking, which may be difficult for individuals who have time constraints, don't like to cook, or frequently travel - requires regular grocery shopping and willingness to purchase non-traditional ingredients in order to "clean up" recipes - may be more expensive than other approaches due to volume of food required and some of the more unique ingredients - emphasis on frequent meals and preparation may cause some to experience feelings of preoccupation with food 	This is an excellent approach for "foodies" and those that appreciate the quality of their food, as well as cooking and experimenting with new ingredients. Like many of the approaches, it is for many a way of life, especially since many adherents bring most of their food around with them. For those who are prone to preoccupation with food, the mini-meal aspect of this may need to be altered as this could cause problems. This approach is probably the healthiest, as it deemphasizes additives and any kind of processed or packaged food, but sometimes to an extreme.
Cleanses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Juice cleanses - Master Cleanse 	similar to meal replacements, but instead of using shakes or green smoothies, users juice fruits and vegetables for 1-3 meals per day; other diets require more unique concoctions (e.g., Master Cleanse)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - some users report excellent improvements in blood chemistry (e.g., triglycerides, cholesterol) - extremely nutrient dense - potential improvements in skin health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - juices lack fiber, which could lead to quick hunger - lacks balance and does little to promote healthy return to normal eating - expensive, as much of the fruit and vegetable is discarded as pulp, as well as purchasing an expensive juicer - some percentage of the weight lost is likely to be regained as much will be water weight 	Juicing may be beneficial for some individuals looking to get nutrient-loaded drinks that quickly allow them to add tons of vitamins and minerals to their diet without consuming copious amounts of whole foods. Caution should be warranted with simply adding juices (or smoothies for that matter) to their diet, as this could actually cause weight gain if it caused an excess of calories.
Intermittent Fasting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lean Gains - Warrior Diet 	fasting for a portion of the day (approximately 14-16 hours), or of the week (e.g., one day), and then eating normally in the remaining 8 hours or days; Lean Gains users typically eat one large meal and one or two smaller meals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - may be combined with other approaches for physique athletes (e.g., If It Fits Your Macros) - may be used by itself for non-athletes looking for an easy approach - allows for a "feasting" approach to eating with a larger meal - some users report less "preoccupation" with food and better concentration during the rest of the day, since they are only eating once or twice - some users report excellent losses in body fat weight using this approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - must be able to eat during the scheduled eating time, so requires a somewhat regular day-to-day schedule - may experience feelings of bloat or temporary weight gain (water weight) immediately after eating a large meal - individuals with blood sugar issues should consult with their doctors first and possibly check blood sugar to ensure neither too high nor too low - caution should be taken with individuals who workout or perform in athletic events to ensure that performance is not impaired 	This approach may work well for someone with an extremely busy job or lifestyle who finds it difficult to eat throughout the day. This approach may be combined with clean eating, however liquid calories are not recommended as they may not satiate as much. Adequate fiber is essential.

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Vegetarianism/ Veganism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Veganism - Vegetarianism 	these are not so much diets as they are lifestyles; adherents may be doing so for moral/ethical reasons vs. weight loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - vegan/vegetarian approaches may cause the individual to consume more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and plant-based proteins, thus improving the quality of their diet - reducing meat/animal product consumption may inadvertently reduce caloric intake, resulting in weight loss - vegan/vegetarian approaches may cause greater reflection and attention to one's overall health, promoting better choices in general 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a vegan/vegetarian diet can be excessively high in calories, carbs, fat, sugar or just junk - just because it's vegan/vegetarian, does <i>not</i> make it healthy and does not inherently result in weight loss - vegan/vegetarian diets that cause the individual to turn to "fake" foods (e.g., fake meat, fake cheese) are still fake, "engineered" foods - may be expensive - may be more difficult in social situations (e.g., dining out or at family gatherings, as meat/animal products are found in many foods) 	<p>Know your reasons for selecting this type of diet. Weight loss should <i>not</i> be the first. Eliminating meat/animal products may secondarily cause one to reduce caloric consumption, thus resulting in weight loss, but this doesn't mean that meat was at fault.</p> <p>There are plenty of vegan/vegetarian "junk foods" out there. It should also be noted that vegetarianism is not too hard to follow, especially in light of the past statement, but veganism can be extremely difficult to follow and requires an excellent understanding of proper nutrition, macro and micronutrients (i.e., vitamin and mineral needs), and how to properly combine these foods. Do not make this decision lightly.</p>

The Bottom, Bottom Line:

1. Pick an approach that best works for YOUR specific lifestyle. It doesn't matter how well a diet worked for someone else. It only matters how well it works for you - and well includes how healthy you are. If you are losing weight but you feel like crap or you can't perform your function, I don't consider this successful. Consider the WHOLE PERSON.
2. Pick an approach that works not only for you, but will work for you as part of a family or bigger system (e.g., if your family is a bunch of hunters, carefully consider the decision to become a Vegan). It is hard enough to change your own diet, but if you don't have adequate social support, or even worse, if people are unsupportive, it will most likely fail.
3. Pick an approach that is affordable. There is nothing worse than starting an approach then realizing that you can't continue to purchase the required ingredients. This is especially notable with juicing and clean eating.
4. Pick an approach that sounds enjoyable. Do you love smoothies? Maybe a meal replacement would be fun, as it would feel less like a chore and it might be fun to experiment with different ingredients to find your favorites.
5. My take? I would combine the best of each of these worlds...here's what I mean:
 1. Food tracking - you should be aware of what you eat. I think everyone should track, weigh, and measure their food for at least 2 weeks - it can be very educational. You might realize where all your problems are coming from.
 2. IIFYM - I like the idea of having indulgences here and there, so long as they fit into your plan. I always make the analogy of a checking account - if I want to take a trip to Europe, I better save some money and not just spend willy-nilly on every little thing I see at the store. Same thing goes for food - if I want to have a dessert and glass of wine out tonight, I better make some deposits into my account, which means exercising harder than normal and taking it easy the rest of the day.
 3. Commercial programs - I am not a huge fan of the pre-packaged food, but if this will do it for you and keep you on track, be my guest. Also, I love the idea of social support in programs like Weight Watchers. I am not a big fan of making up an arbitrary point system that overcomplicates things, though, and has little relevance outside of the program. But again, if it works for you, please continue.
 4. Low-carb - I like carbs and so do most people, but emphasizing ones lower on the glycemic index (Google it) will keep you fuller longer and burn slower in your body vs. spiking your blood sugar and then sending you into a coma.
 5. Low-fat - The jury is still out on this one, but plenty of research has told us that too much animal fat may put you at higher risk for cardiovascular disease and other chronic conditions. No fat is not good either.
 6. Anti-allergen - If you are seriously allergic to something or if you know a food makes you feel like s***, why the heck are you eating it? Buck up and stop.
 7. Meal replacement - I am a fan of meal replacements. I think it keeps things easy and the research supports it. BUT I think they should be healthy, well-balanced and full of the stuff you weren't going to eat anyways (a little bit of fruit, some spinach, a quality protein, and some healthy fats...I have tons of recipes for these).
 8. Cleanses - Please don't. But if you want to substitute something crappy from your diet for a healthy juice, that sounds like a great idea!
 9. Intermittent fasting - I'm intrigued here. I don't think this will work for everyone, but for those who are just "too busy to eat," this might be an interesting experiment.
 10. Vegetarianism/Veganism - I think the world could eat less meat. First of all, it's expensive and I really like animals. I know that last point will be contended, but aside from that, substituting meat for some healthy plant-based proteins would probably do everyone quite a bit of good, even if only once or twice a week. But please don't tell me you're becoming a vegetarian/vegan to lose weight.