

Weighing in on fad diets

How to pick the diet that's right for you

If you type 'diet book' into Amazon's search bar, your query will yield more than 50,000 results. Whether you want to lose weight, boost your energy, or just feel better, the options to optimize your nutrition are endless. If you find it all confusing and contradictory, you are not alone. We asked Renee Cha, a registered dietitian at St. Mary's Regional Hospital, to weigh in on which diets really work.

Ditch the word diet

Cha's first piece of advice may surprise you. She recommends replacing the word diet in your vocabulary with lifestyle. Cha explains, "The word diet has such a negative connotation and unless you are extremely motivated and disciplined, it's not going to be sustainable. I don't think I know one person that has been able to stay on a 'diet', but I know many that live a healthy lifestyle."

Lasting change comes from lifestyle modifications aimed at living and feeling healthier. Although a slimmer waistline may be what motivates you, Cha says the focus shouldn't be to lose 1-2 pounds per week, but to take the steps that can result in the desired weight loss.

Put yourself on a budget

View your nutrition choices like you do money. For example, healthy adults should only have 2,300 milligrams of salt (sodium) a day. That's just a single teaspoon of table salt. Think of those 2,300 milligrams as a \$2,300 budget to spend for the day. The goal, whether it be salt, sugar or any other ingredient, is to know how much you have in your budget so you save where you can and spend where you want.

"If you know you're planning on enjoying pasta at night, eat a light breakfast and load up on veggies during the day," explains Cha. "I think a lot of diets have good parts to them, the Mediterranean diet is one of the best, but it should be a guideline, rather than a rule book."

These questions can help you make better short-term decisions and lead to lifelong changes:

- Are you making a mindful choice?
- What are you eating with it?
- Are you really hungry or does it just look good?
- How will you feel afterward? Is it worth it?
- How are you going to balance your decision?

The best defense is a good offense

Hangry, the state of being tired and hungry, is now an official word in the English-Oxford dictionary. It's also one of the official leading causes of poor nutritional choices. Set aside a few hours every week to prep a few large meals. Aim to eat 20 different plant-based foods throughout the week. It may sound like a lot of work, but it will eliminate stress during the week, save you an hour of cooking every night, and give your body what it needs to perform better.



St. Mary's Regional Hospital

Renee Cha, MS, RDN, CNSC is a registered dietitian at St. Mary's Regional Hospital.



A spoonful of sugar: How many is too many?

You probably know sugar is in your favorite drink, but did you know it's also hiding in yogurt, granola bars, almond milk, and more? Labels can be tricky to read. Sugar is always listed in grams. Here's what you need to know:

Four grams = 1 teaspoon

Limit your added sugar per day to 30 grams, that's 7.5 teaspoons.



Need more support?

When exercise and eating better aren't enough, the Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Center at St. Mary's offers a wide range of solutions to help you achieve a healthier life.



Scan the QR code with your smart phone camera to learn more and meet our providers.