

# HOW TO DETERMINE FACT FROM FAD

**Words:** Mr.Mario Caruana BSc(Hns), MSc Dietetics (UK), PhDcand. Registered Dietitian and Nutritionist

Currently we are hearing of various diets which promise dramatic weight loss or health benefits. This is the field of what is termed fad diets - the kind of regimens where you eat a very restrictive diet or an unusual combination of foods for a short period of time, lose weight quickly, but then get fed up, start eating all the wrong foods and pile the weight back on! Some of these diets can actually be dangerous to your health. Table 1 lists some common types of fad diets.

## Examples of Fad Diets:

| DIET TYPE                | SOME EXAMPLES   |
|--------------------------|---|
| Controlled Carbohydrates | Dr.Atkins New Diet Revolution The Zone                                |
| Food Combining           | Hay Diet  |
| Liquid Diet              | Cambridge Diet  |
| Other                    | Eat Right For Your Type: The Blood Type Diet Sinful Diet Macrobiotics |

### How to spot bad dietary advice

- Stay away from diets that:
- Promise a quick fix
  - Recommend magical fat-burning effects of foods (eg grapefruit)
  - Promote the avoidance or severe limitation of a whole food group, such as carbohydrate foods or dairy foods (and suggest large doses of vitamin and mineral supplements as a replacement)
  - Promote eating mainly one type of food (eg cabbage soup or eggs)
  - Suggest easy, rapid weight loss (more than 1kg/week)
  - Recommend eating foods only in particular combinations
  - Make claims that sound 'too good to be true'.
  - Focus only on your appearance rather than on health benefits

- Kinesiology
- Craniosacral therapy
- Hair mineral analysis
- Face reading
- Tongue reading
- Colonic irrigation
- Magnetic therapy.

### If fad diets don't work, why are they so popular?

People are often willing to try anything that promises to help them lose weight because they want to look or feel better, or because they are worried about getting weight-related diseases. Companies that promote fad diets take advantage of this fact. They appeal to people by promising weight loss that is very quick and easy. Many people prefer to try the quick fix of a fad diet instead of making the effort to lose weight through long-term changes in their eating and exercise habits.

Fad diets also become popular because many of them do work for a short time. In many cases, this is because when you stop eating certain types of food or eat "special" combinations of foods, you are getting fewer calories than you normally would. You are also paying more attention to what you are eating. However, it's likely that much of the weight you lose is from water and lean muscle, not body fat. Also, most people are not able to keep up with the demands of a diet that strictly limits their food choices or requires them to eat the same foods over

and over again. People who use fad diets usually end up gaining back any weight that they lost.

### Basic Guidelines

So what's the best advice for getting rid of the extra pounds and keeping them off? You need to think about not only the food you eat but also your lifestyle and the amount of activity you do. You also need to think carefully about ways of changing your behaviour and developing new healthier habits if you are to lose weight and keep it off in the longer term. Seek the advice of a Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist. Dietitians have recognised qualifications and will be able to give you safe, unbiased, evidence-based advice.

### Here are a few ideas to get you going:

- Keep a diary and stay more aware of habits and problem areas
- Choose lower fat foods, eg lean meat and lower fat dairy products
- Watch those portion sizes!
- Fill up on vegetables and fruit as snacks and for desserts.
- Have regular meals, starting with breakfast
- Get active, aim for at least 30 minutes daily of moderate activity. If you can manage more than that even better - ideally aim to build up to 60 minutes a day!
- Be realistic about weight loss; aim to lose 0.5-1kg/week

### Who knows what?

- Don't be fooled by the fact that many beautiful celebrities are following some of these weird and bizarre regimens. They usually have the perfect environment to lose weight. You should also be wary of unqualified practitioners who may be offering unproven techniques for diagnosis and treatment of nutritional problems. Be very skeptical of the following:
- Iridology