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Lose those weight-loss myths

Some diet advice should be taken with a grain of salt

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Every day we are bombarded with information about the best ways to lose weight. But despite the number of tips that we receive — from the media, well-meaning friends and family members, and even the products on store shelves — we may not know the whole truth about weight loss. With a number of myths still in circulation, we need to dig a little deeper to find the truth.

Food myths

NUTS. There's nothing crazy about adding nuts to your diet. Packed with protein and dietary fiber, they can help you feel full and prevent you from overeating so that you have long-lasting weight-loss results. But be careful — though it's tempting to eat a whole can of cashews or almonds because they're so tasty, nuts pack a huge caloric punch and should be eaten in moderation.

LOW-CARB FOODS. The carb-cutting craze is still fairly prevalent among dieters, but foods that promise low carbohydrates aren't necessarily healthy or tasty. Not only are you depriving yourself of the carbohydrates that your body needs to produce energy, but these foods may be filled with more sodium or fat than you need in order to keep them flavorful so that you don't feel like you're eating carb-free cardboard.

SUGAR-FREE FOODS. If you're a sugar addict, cutting down on the sweet stuff is always a good idea, but don't let the lack of sugar in these foods make you forget about the calories. Just because a food is sugar free doesn't make it calorie free — and in some cases, sugar-free foods have more calories than their sugar-packed counterparts.

DIET SHAKES. Although many diet shakes are touted as good meal replacements, they may leave you feeling unsatisfied and reaching for snacks in almost no time after you've finished the last drop. That's not to say that they don't have

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Eat smart

Even if you've had some dieting disasters, it's never too late to build a healthy nutritional foundation. Here are

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some tips on how to do it.

TAKE STOCK. At the end of each day, count how many servings of fruits and veggies you've eaten. If it's only two or three, make a point of adding one more serving the next day until you're eating a minimum of five servings a day.

DON'T DRINK YOUR CALORIES. Soda, alcohol and even fruit juice can add up in terms of calories. By reducing your consumption of these drinks, you can reduce your overall daily calorie count.

MINDFUL EATING. Multitasking while we're eating our meals can make it easy to binge without realizing it. But if you eat mindfully — taking the time to eat without distractions as you pay attention to what you're putting into your body — you can reduce overeating and increase the overall enjoyment of your food.

PLAN AHEAD. There's good sense behind the old cliché about not shopping while hungry. A lot of bad eating habits are caused by grabbing food at the last minute, so if you plan ahead for your weekly meals, you can have more control over caloric intake and avoid binging on unhealthy diet busters.

their place: If you're pressed for time, a diet shake can be a great way to ensure that you don't skip a meal, but shakes are not meant to regularly replace meals.

Other weight-loss myths

ONE SIZE FITS ALL. Your BFF has been shedding pounds since she started her new diet, so naturally she wants to tell everyone all about it. But don't be quick to copy cat — jumping on someone else's diet bandwagon may not be what's best for your bod.

"If someone else picks up your plan about how you lost weight, it can potentially be damaging to them," said Heather Fischer, nutritional counselor at Florida State University. "If I have chronic kidney failure and somebody tells me to go on a high-protein diet because that's good for weight loss, and I'm not aware that I have renal insufficiency, too much protein can bump me into failure, and I may end up

needing dialysis,"

LONG-TERM EFFECTS. Sure, you may lose weight quickly following the fads, but these diets are not meant to be long-term solutions for keeping the pounds off. Also, fad diets don't address the big picture of fitness — and the fact that the scale is not the end-all and be-all of good health, and some diets may ultimately do more harm than good.

"People look at weight and their body composition because they want to look a certain way, but they forget about all the aspects of health and fitness — like blood pressure, cholesterol and all the other factors that can totally be affected by the food that they're taking in," said Sherman Rosier of Fit and Functional.

TAKING IT OFF THE TABLE. We've all heard about the foods that we're not supposed to eat, but experts say that there is really no food that you have to take off the table permanently. In moderation, you can enjoy your favorite foods, which will help reduce overeating caused by deprivation.

"There really isn't any food that you should totally cut out in order to maintain a healthy weight," said local registered dietician Amy Magnuson. "There isn't one food that's going to make or break you."

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