

Diet trends

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What GPs and patients need to know.

Further reading

- Visit www.eatforhealth.gov.au for more information on serve sizes across age groups and gender
- Visit www.daa.asn.au/for-the-public/smart-eating-for-you/nutrition-a-z/paleo-diet to access the DAA's three-part series on the paleo diet
- Visit <http://daa.asn.au/for-the-media/hot-topics-in-nutrition/low-carbohydrate-high-fat-diets-for-diabetes> for more information on low-carbohydrate, high-fat diets for diabetes

References

1. Green Pool. Sugar consumption in Australia: A statistical update. Brisbane: Green Pool Commodity Specialists; 2012. Available at http://greenpoolcommodities.com/files/8113/4932/3223/121004_Sugar_Consumption_in_Australia_-_A_Statistical_Update_-_Public_Release_Document.pdf [Accessed 30 October 2015].
2. World Health Organization. Sugars intake for adults and children. Geneva: WHO; 2015. Available at www.who.int/nutrition/publications/guidelines/sugars_intake/en [Accessed 30 October 2015].
3. National Health and Medical Research Council. Eat for health: Australian Dietary Guidelines. Canberra: NHMRC; 2013. Available at www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines [Accessed 30 October 2015].
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics. Australian health survey: Nutrition first results – Food and nutrients, 2011–12. Available at www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4364.0.55.007~2011-12~Main%20Features~Key%20Findings~1 [Accessed 30 October 2015].
5. Ajala O, English P, Pinkney J. Systematic review and meta-analysis of different dietary approaches to the management of type 2 diabetes. *Am J Clin Nutr* 2013;97(3):505–16.

Fad diets are nothing new. People can often rely on books, celebrities and media reports for information and ideas about diet and nutrition. Such sources can frequently provide minimal context and lack supporting evidence, and trendy diet books and advice tends to focus on a few food groups rather than all five.

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) supports the Australian Dietary Guidelines and encourages people to seek advice from a qualified health professional. So what answers can GPs provide when patients discuss these diet trends?

'I'm avoiding all sugar to help lose weight'

It is true that some Australians currently eat too much added sugar. Research from 2012 found Australians eat an average of more than 27 teaspoons of sugar per day,¹ well above the global recommendation of approximately 10 teaspoons (based on the average adult diet of 8700KJ).²

However, while excess added sugar can contribute to weight gain, it is simplistic to blame sugar alone for rising rates of overweight and obesity and related health problems. The trouble with trying to avoid sugar is that it means fruit and dairy foods, which provide important nutrients, are often also avoided.

It is added sugar, such as that found in confectionary, pastries, ice-cream and sugar-sweetened drinks, that should be limited. Key points for GPs:³

- Fruit provides fibre, vitamins and water
- Adults and children older than nine should have two serves of fruit each day
- Dairy foods, such as milk, yoghurt and cheese are the best food source of calcium.
- Adults require at least 2.5 serves of dairy foods each day (mostly reduced fat)
- Limit added sugars and discretionary foods

'I'm eating a paleo diet and I feel great'

The paleo diet does have some good features, such as promoting consumption of fruit and vegetables, lean meat and fish.

But it also has problematic areas: excluding nutritious core foods such as breads, cereals and dairy; relying heavily on protein; and supporting foods high in saturated fat like butter and bacon.

Dietitians are also concerned that the paleo diet encourages 'restrictive eating', which is not sustainable in the long-term. By banning certain nutritious food groups, followers of this diet will be at a greater risk of falling short of important nutrients, as all food groups are needed for good health.³

Key points for GPs:

- Increasing fruit and vegetable intake is a good thing. Slightly less than half of Australian adults meet the recommended daily fruit intake and only 6.8% meet the recommended vegetable intake⁴
- Dairy is a rich source of calcium and should be included in the diet unless there is an allergy or intolerance, in which case a calcium-fortified alternative should be recommended
- Wholegrains should be included in the diet as a major source of fibre and B vitamins

'Is a low-carbohydrate, high-fat diet best to help manage my diabetes?'

A recent review and meta-analysis of a variety of diets (low-carbohydrate, low-glycaemic index [GI], high-protein, and Mediterranean) for people with diabetes found some short-term benefits in a low-carbohydrate diet.⁵

These benefits included some improvement in HbA1c (although the low-GI and Mediterranean diets performed better on this measure), weight loss (those on the Mediterranean diet lost more weight) and improved high-density lipoprotein cholesterol (also seen in the low-GI and Mediterranean groups).

It can be difficult to incorporate a low-carbohydrate diet without dramatic changes to the types of foods normally eaten. Unfortunately, this can create challenges for people who live with others (such as families) to adjust the diet to suit everyone and it may risk some members' nutritional needs, particularly children and adolescents.

In addition, all fats are energy-dense and can make weight control more difficult if eaten in large amounts.

Key points for GPs:

- Low-GI and Mediterranean diets are as effective, if not more, for management of HbA1c, weight loss and high-density lipoprotein cholesterol levels
- Low-GI and Mediterranean diets are easier to follow and incorporate into a family eating plan
- Limit foods high in saturated fat, such as cakes, pastries, processed meats, fried foods, chips, butter, cream, coconut and palm oil, etc ☹

Author bio

Liz Kellett is President of the Dietitians Association of Australia. She is an advanced accredited practising dietitian with more than 40 years' experience in clinical, management, community health and private practice settings.

Diet and Fitness Trends. What the future holds for our eating and exercising habits. By Colette Bouchez.Â Similarly, trend forecaster Gerald Celente predicts a turn away from the "strictly weight loss diet book" and a move toward what he calls "whole-health" eating -- diets that not only help us lose weight, but live a healthier lifestyle. "We will focus our attention on those plans that provide us with 'recipes' for staying healthy in mind, body and spirit," says Celente, publisher of The Trends Journal and director of TrendsResearch.com.