

Transcript Season 2: Episode 2 – Fast Facts on Fad Diets

Podcast Opener:

Are you buying groceries on your own for the first time? Or maybe you are trying to plan meals for yourself or maybe your new baby?

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Podcast Script:

Pamela Luker:

Have you heard of the zone diet, the paleo diet or the ketogenic diet? How about a south beach diet? The raw food diet, the macrobiotic diet or the master cleanse? They are in a category of diets labeled fad diets.

Hello, I'm Pamela Luker, the family consumer sciences agent for Pope County. Today's podcast topic is fast facts on fad diets. I'm interviewing Dr. Jamie Baum the Associate Professor of Nutrition and Director of the Center for Human Nutrition Department of Food Science with the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture.

Dr. Baum, why are the diets I just mentioned considered fad diets?

Dr. Baum:

Well, thanks for asking Pamela, and thanks for inviting me to do the podcast.

So, a fad diet is really a diet that claims to help a person lose a large amount of weight in a really short period of time. They have a lot of different things in common, like the weight loss is usually promoted through unhealthy ways, maybe just from drinking juice or fasting for a long period of time. They usually focus on one or two food groups and removing of other food groups. So maybe eliminating carbohydrates or don't eat fruit, things like that.

They're usually not supported through scientific research. So, if you see a claim on social media or something on TV and you go to look it up, you probably won't find a lot of science about it. They're really diets, I think that are meant to be followed for a short period of time because if you follow them for too long, it could have unhealthy side effects.

They tend to be really low in calories. That's really what's driving that large amount of weight loss is just not eating much. They claim that there's no need to exercise and they usually have a really strict menu or plan you have to follow.

Pamela Luker:

Okay, that's good information. Do you mind explaining a few of the most popular fad diets today?

Dr. Baum:

Sure. So, I think actually I'll start with the ketogenic diet because that diet, I think, is the number one Googled diet in Arkansas if you look at Google Analytics.

And so, the keto diet, it does have health benefits. It was first started. They found eliminating carbohydrates and it helped children and people with epilepsy prevent seizures.

But really, it tells you, "You can't." You have to eat, I think, less than 50 or 20 grams of carbohydrates a day. So that's like one hundred to two hundred calories only from carbohydrates. And it's really a high fat diet, not necessarily a high protein diet, and it forces your body.

The theory is it forces your body to burn fat. There are more and more research coming out about the ketogenic diet, and it does help some people, but the science is still out on whether or not it's an overall healthy diet to follow because it's really hard to stick to.

Another real popular diet is the paleo diet. Sometimes it's called the caveman diet, and this got really popular when CrossFit gyms also became really popular. They tended to go hand-in-hand.

And these diet claims that our current diet doesn't reflect what our ancestors ate and that our diet and food technology has progressed too fast, that our bodies can't keep up with that progression. So that's what's led to the obesity problem so that we need to eat fewer processed foods.

They really want you to cut out simple carbohydrates. And focus on non-starchy vegetables, so like eliminating things like potatoes, sometimes even, they don't eat carrots and fresh fruit. And get your fiber from fruits and veggies, not grains.

So, this diet has a lot of exclusions. You can't eat dairy, you can't eat greens, you can't eat legumes, which are things like beans and lentils. Processed oils. Refined sugar. Salt, coffee, alcohol. So, it becomes really restrictive, which also makes that difficult to follow over the long term.

And then I think one that a lot of us have probably heard or heard about because it's been around since the 70s is the Atkins diet. Even in Walmart or grocery stores, you'll see Atkins bars. They have frozen foods, and this just involves proteins. It's kind of similar to the ketogenic diet, but it involves cutting out carbohydrates to switch your metabolism to burn more fat as energy.

So, it's supposed to do the same thing for me and you to your body as the keto diet. But I think, you know, a lot of people just get their information from like a Pinterest post or Instagram or Facebook post, and they don't actually go and read the whole theory behind a lot of these diets.

So, like Atkins Diet Zone Diet South Beach, which were kind of dated, but other diets like Dukan Diet and a lot of these other diets have phases where you just cut out a lot at the beginning to have a lot of success and keep you motivated. But by the end, when you're in a weight maintenance period and you've lost all the weight you wanted to lose, you're eating all the different food groups again. But I don't think people ever read that far usually, and a lot of these diets take an all or nothing kind of approach rather than teaching you to balance your diet and your eating pattern.

Pamela Luker:

Good! Thank you for explaining that to us. So how would we determine if a diet is a fad diet?

Dr. Baum:

So that's a great question, and we do have some fact sheets about this. So, refer to the fact sheet site with Extension.

But really, if it tells you to eliminate one or several food groups, so no carbs for no fruit, things like that.

Does it promise quick, quick results? So, do they tell you you're going to lose five pounds or more in a week?

Are there a lot of personal testimonies with like before and after pictures that are used to prove the diet, but not a lot of scientific studies?

Does it only use certain foods that offer special advantages for weight loss?

Do they recommend buying their pill or their supplement or some sort of device?

Is it advertised or written by a celebrity? That's usually a good key.

Really, again, look for the science. Do they cite any science on their website? Is exercise minimized? Because we know now, like the science keeps showing more and more that exercise is equally, if not more important for health and weight loss than just watching your diet alone.

Is there a food that can be eaten and others that must be eliminated like we heard about with the paleo diet? Is the research presented sponsored by that company that's promoting the diet and do the result sounds simply too good to be true? I think that's the big kicker. If it sounds like a miracle, it's probably not.

Pamela Luker:

Well, thank you for clarifying some things to look for. Because I know that some of these diets are really popular right now and it can get confusing and having that success early on can get you excited and really make you want to try that diet, but it may not work long term. So, I appreciate you clarifying that for us.

So, we talked about some of these diets that we need to look at them that are fad diets, but what are some examples of some healthy diets?

Dr. Baum:

So, I think really the one that gets the most attention and has a lot of science is the Mediterranean diet. So that's, you know, an eating pattern that similar to people who live along the Mediterranean Sea, so their diets that are like high in fruits and vegetables, low on red meat, have a lot of fiber, like a lot of olive oil, which we know is good for heart health.

And I think an important component of the Mediterranean diet is also physical activity. So, if you look at like the Mediterranean diet food pyramid; activity is really at the foundation, and it really limits red meat and sweets.

Another one is the Dash diet, so that's a dietary approach to stop hypertension. So that diet has a lot of research and a lot of evidence that shows its effectiveness really in lowering blood pressure, improving cholesterol, things like that. But usually as a result of improving your diet, you lose weight.

A newer one that's come out is called the Mayan diet. And that's a combination of this Mediterranean diet and dash diet. And I don't think it's really been studied yet for weight loss, but it has been shown to improve like markers of Alzheimer's disease. So, it helps with some of like, improve or delay the onset of some of the symptoms related to Alzheimer's disease.

So, there are a lot of healthy eating patterns out there. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans have some great information on the website that are the user-friendly format about how to adapt some of these diets for like the American life.

Pamela Luker:

All right, thank you, Dr. Baum, for sharing the facts on fad diets.

Dr. Baum:

And then I guess just some take home messages is just remember that healthy diets are based on healthy eating patterns, controlling your portions, and choosing nutrient dense foods. So, these are foods that have a lot of vitamins and minerals, but not a lot of calories.

And remember that physical activity and exercise are also important for a healthy lifestyle, and improving your health requires many lifestyle changes in time.

So, it's really important to set realistic, achievable goals that you can build up over time and have a lot of small wins.

And if you want more information on any of these topics or different eating patterns, just visit the DEFEND website and you'll find a lot of fast facts and YouTube tutorials there.

Pamela:

All right, well, thank you, Dr. Baum, for sharing the facts on fad diets. I think all of us come and get confused when it comes to some of these diets.

And it's been nice having you to clarify with us what the research says about them.

Dr. Baum:

Well, thank you, Pamela. It was my pleasure. And just remember, if a diet sounds too good to be true, it's probably a fad diet.

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