

# The 9 Best Diet Plans for Your Overall Health

Many diets offer benefits that go beyond weight loss. The best programs for losing weight also improve your overall health. The biggest challenge is finding the one that will work for you.

Diets aren't just for weight loss. While changing your diet can be one of the best ways to lose weight, it can also be a gateway to improving your habits, focusing on your health, and leading a more active lifestyle.

Yet the sheer number of available diet plans may make it difficult to get started. Different diets will be more suitable, sustainable, and effective for different people.

Some diets aim to curb your appetite to reduce your food intake, while others suggest restricting your intake of calories and either carbs or fat. Some focus more on certain eating patterns and lifestyle changes, rather than on limiting certain foods.

What's more, many offer health benefits that go beyond weight loss.

Here are the 9 best diet plans to help you improve your overall health.

## 1. The Mediterranean diet

The Mediterranean diet has long been considered the gold standard for nutrition, disease prevention, wellness, and longevity. This is based on its nutrition benefits and sustainability.

## How it works

The Mediterranean diet is based on foods that people in countries like Italy and Greece have traditionally eaten. It is rich in: vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fish, nuts, lentils, olive oil. Foods such as poultry, eggs, and dairy products are to be eaten in moderation, and red meats are limited.

Additionally, the Mediterranean diet limits:

- refined grains
- trans fats
- processed meats
- added sugar
- other highly processed foods

## Health benefits

This diet's emphasis on minimally processed foods and plants has been associated with a reduced risk of multiple chronic diseases and increased life expectancy. Studies also show that the Mediterranean diet has a preventive effect against certain cancers.

Though the diet was designed to lower heart disease risk, numerous studies indicate that its plant-based, high unsaturated fat dietary pattern can also aid in weight loss ([2](#)).

A systematic review analyzing five different studies found that, compared with a low fat diet, the Mediterranean diet resulted in greater weight loss after 1 year. Compared with a low carb diet, it produced similar weight loss results.

One study in more than 500 adults over 12 months found that higher adherence to a Mediterranean diet was associated with double the likelihood of weight loss maintenance.

Additionally, the Mediterranean diet encourages eating plenty of antioxidant-rich foods, which may help [combat inflammation](#) and oxidative stress by neutralizing free radicals.

## Other benefits

Recent studies have also found that the Mediterranean diet is associated with decreased risk of mental disorders, including cognitive decline and depression.

Eating less meat is also associated with a more sustainable diet for the planet.

## Downsides

Since the Mediterranean diet does not put a big emphasis on dairy products, it's important to make sure you still get enough calcium and vitamin D in your diet.

### SUMMARY

The Mediterranean diet emphasizes eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, fish, and healthy oils while restricting refined and highly processed foods.

While it's not a weight loss diet, studies show that it can promote weight loss and overall health.

## 2. The DASH diet

Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension, or [DASH](#), is an eating plan designed to help treat or prevent high blood pressure, which is clinically known as hypertension.

It emphasizes eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean meats. It is low in salt, red meat, added sugars, and fat.

While the DASH diet is not a weight loss diet, many people report losing weight on it.

## How it works

The DASH diet recommends specific servings of different food groups. The number of servings you are encouraged to eat depends on your daily calorie intake.

For example, each day an average person on the DASH diet would eat about:

- five servings of vegetables
- five servings of fruit
- seven servings of healthy carbs like whole grains
- two servings of low fat dairy products
- two servings or fewer of lean meats

In addition, it's recommended to consume nuts and seeds two to three times per week.

## Health benefits

The DASH diet has been shown to reduce blood pressure levels and several heart disease risk factors. Also, it may help lower your risk of breast and colorectal cancers.

Studies show that the DASH diet can also help you lose weight. For example, an analysis of 13 studies found that people on the DASH diet lost more weight over 8–24 weeks than people on a control diet.

Another study in adults with obesity over 12 weeks found that the DASH diet helped decrease total body weight, body fat percentage, and absolute fat mass in study participants while preserving muscle strength.

## Other benefits

In addition to weight loss, the DASH diet may help combat depression symptoms.

A comparative study over 8 years found that even moderate adherence to the DASH diet was related to lower depression risk.

## Downsides

While the DASH diet may aid with weight loss and lower blood pressure in individuals with hypertension, there is mixed evidence on [salt intake](#) and blood pressure.

Eating too little salt has been linked to increased insulin resistance, and a low sodium diet isn't the right choice for everyone.

A low sodium diet like the DASH diet is more appropriate for individuals with hypertension or other health conditions that benefit from or require sodium restriction.

More research is needed in this area to understand how a low sodium diet can affect insulin resistance in individuals without hypertension.

### SUMMARY

The DASH diet is a low salt diet that has been shown to aid with weight loss.

Studies have also linked it to additional benefits for your heart and reduced risks of other chronic diseases.

# 3. Plant-based and flexitarian diets

[Vegetarianism and veganism](#) are the most popular versions of plant-based diets, which restrict animal products for health, ethical, and environmental reasons.

However, more flexible plant-based diets also exist, such as the [flexitarian diet](#). This is a plant-based diet that allows eating animal products in moderation.

## How it works

Typical vegetarian diets restrict meat of all kinds but allow dairy products. Typical vegan diets restrict all animal products, including dairy, butter, and sometimes other byproducts like honey.

The flexitarian eating plan does not have clear-cut rules or recommendations about calories and macronutrients, so it's considered more of a lifestyle than a diet. Its principles include:

- consuming protein from plants instead of animals
- eating mostly fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains
- eating the least processed, most natural forms of foods
- limiting sugar and sweets

Additionally, it allows the flexibility to consume meat and animal products from time to time.

## Health benefits

Numerous studies have shown that plant-based diets can reduce your risk of developing chronic diseases, including improved markers of metabolic health, decreased blood pressure, and reduced risk of type 2 diabetes. They can also help you lose weight.

Flexitarian diets have also been shown to reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes and improve metabolic health and blood pressure, plus may have their own weight loss benefits.

## Other benefits

For those who are looking to lead a sustainable lifestyle, decreasing your meat consumption can also reduce greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and soil degradation ([19](#)).

## Downsides

Plant-based eating patterns like vegetarianism and veganism can sometimes be difficult to maintain and may feel restricting, especially if you're switching from a more meat-based eating style.

And while the flexibility of the flexitarian diet makes it easy to follow, being too flexible with it may counteract its benefits.

### SUMMARY

Plant-based diets like veganism and vegetarianism can have real health benefits, such as a reduced risk of type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. However, they can also feel restricting for some people.

The flexitarian diet is a less strict version of a plant-based diet that allows for minimal meat and animal product consumption.

## 4. The MIND diet

The Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay (MIND) diet combines aspects of the Mediterranean and DASH diets to create an eating pattern that focuses on brain health.

### How it works

Like the flexitarian diet, the [MIND diet](#) does not have a strict meal plan, but instead encourages eating 10 specific foods with brain health benefits.

Per week, MIND includes eating:

- six or more servings of green, leafy vegetables
- one serving of non-starchy vegetables
- five or more servings of nuts

Other foods it encourages multiple times a week include:

- berries
- beans
- olive oil
- whole grains
- fish
- poultry

### Health benefits



Research shows that the MIND diet may reduce a person's risk of developing Alzheimer's disease, and studies show that the MIND diet is superior to other plant-rich diets for improving cognition.

Research also shows that the MIND diet can help slow cognitive decline and improve resiliency in older adults.

It may also help delay the onset of the movement disorder Parkinson's disease.

There is little research concerning the MIND diet and weight loss. Yet, since it is a combination of two diets that promote weight loss, the MIND diet may also help you lose weight.

One way it can help promote weight loss is that it encourages limiting your consumption of foods like:

- butter
- cheese
- red meat
- fried food
- sweets

However, more research needs to be done concerning the MIND diet and weight loss.

## **Other benefits**

By combining the best of two diets, the MIND diet has a lot to offer and offers some more flexibility than stricter diets.

While you can eat more than the 10 food groups it recommends, the closer you stick to the diet, the better your results may be.

## SUMMARY

The MIND diet combines aspects of the Mediterranean and DASH diets and may help reduce your risk of Alzheimer's disease and dementia.

However, more research needs to be done to evaluate its ability to help you lose weight.

## 5. WW (formerly Weight Watchers)

WW, formerly [Weight Watchers](#), is one of the most popular weight loss programs worldwide.

While it doesn't restrict any food groups, people on a WW plan must eat within their set number of daily points to help them reach their ideal weight.

### How it works

WW is a points-based system that assigns different foods and beverages a value, depending on their calorie, fat, and fiber contents.

As you work to reach your desired weight, you must stay within your daily point allowance.

### Health benefits

Many studies show that the WW program can help you lose weight.

For example, a review of 45 studies found that people who followed a WW diet lost 2.6% more weight than people who received standard counseling.

What's more, people who follow WW programs have been shown to be more successful at maintaining weight loss after several years, compared with those who follow other diets.

## Other benefits

WW allows flexibility, which makes it easy to follow. This enables people with dietary restrictions, such as those with [food allergies](#), to adhere to the plan.

## Downsides

While it allows for flexibility, WW can be costly depending on the subscription plan and the length of time you intend to follow it.

Studies show that it may take up to 52 weeks to produce significant weight loss and clinical benefits.

Additionally, its flexibility can be a downfall if dieters choose unhealthy foods.

### SUMMARY

WW, or Weight Watchers, is a weight loss and healthy eating program that uses a points-based system.

Studies show that it's effective for long-term weight loss and highly flexible.

## 6. Intermittent fasting

Intermittent fasting is a dietary strategy that cycles between periods of fasting and eating.

[Various forms exist](#), including the 16/8 method, which involves limiting your calorie intake to 8 hours per day. There's also the 5:2 method, which restricts your daily calorie intake to 500–600 calories twice per week.

While it's primarily known as a diet for weight loss, [intermittent fasting](#) may have powerful benefits for both your body and brain.

## How it works

Intermittent fasting restricts the time you're allowed to eat, which is a simple way to reduce your calorie intake. This can lead to weight loss — unless you compensate by eating too much food during allowed eating periods.

## Health benefits

Intermittent fasting has been linked to anti-aging effects, increased insulin sensitivity, improved brain health, reduced inflammation, and many other benefits.

Both animal and human studies show that intermittent fasting may also increase heart health and extend lifespan.

It can also help you lose weight.

In a review of studies, intermittent fasting was shown to cause 0.8–13% weight loss over a period of 2 weeks to 1 year. This is a significantly greater percentage than many other methods.

Other studies found that intermittent fasting can increase fat burning while preserving muscle mass, which can improve metabolism.

## Other benefits

While certain diets can have a lot of rules, require frequent trips to the grocery store, and can be difficult to follow, intermittent fasting is known as a more simple-to-follow eating plan.

Due to the nature of the diet, there are fewer meals that you need to prepare, cook, and clean up after.

## Downsides

In general, intermittent fasting is safe for most healthy adults.

That said, those sensitive to drops in their blood sugar levels should talk with a health professional before starting intermittent fasting. These groups include people:

- who have diabetes
- who have low weight
- who have an eating disorder
- who are pregnant
- who are breastfeeding or chestfeeding

### SUMMARY

Intermittent fasting cycles between periods of fasting and eating.

It has been shown to aid with weight loss and is linked to many other health benefits.

## 7. The Volumetrics diet

The Volumetrics diet was created by Penn State University nutrition professor Barbara Rolls and is meant to be a long-term lifestyle change rather than a strict diet.

## How it works

The eating plan is designed to promote weight loss by having you fill up on nutrient-dense foods that are low in calories and high in water.

Meanwhile, it limits calorie-dense foods like cookies, candies, nuts, seeds, and oils.

The [Volumetrics diet](#) divides food into four categories based on food's calorie density, which can be calculated with a formula created by Rolls. These categories are:

- **Category one:** includes foods of very low calorie density, like non-starchy fruits and vegetables, nonfat milk, and broth-based soup
- **Category two:** includes low calorie-dense foods, like starchy fruits and vegetables, grains, breakfast cereal, low fat meat, legumes, and low fat mixed dishes like chili
- **Category three:** includes medium calorie-dense foods, like meat, cheese, pizza, bread, and ice cream
- **Category four:** includes high calorie-dense foods, like crackers, chips, chocolate candies, nuts, butter, and oil

Meals on the Volumetric diet consist mostly of foods from categories one and two, with limited amounts of food from categories three and four.

No foods are completely off-limits on the Volumetrics diet, and exercise is encouraged for at least 30–60 minutes each day.

## Health benefits

The Volumetrics diet encourages nutritious foods that are low in calories but high in fiber, vitamins, and minerals, which may help increase your intake of key nutrients and protect against [nutritional deficiencies](#).

Research also links diets with a low calorie density to improved diet quality.

Additionally, it limits the amount of processed foods you'll eat, which can decrease your risk of developing certain cancers and heart.

The Volumetrics diet may also help you lose weight.

A review of 13 studies in more than 3,000 people found that diets rich in low calorie density foods led to increased weight loss. Similarly, an 8-year study in more than 50,000 women found that high calorie-dense foods led to increased weight gain.

## Downsides

While the Volumetrics diet may be effective for health benefits and weight loss, it requires a good understanding of Volumetrics, which involves learning about the calorie levels of foods in relation to portion sizes and nutrient levels.

This may be easier for some compared to others.

### SUMMARY

The Volumetrics is designed to promote weight loss by having you fill up on nutrient-dense foods that are low in calories and high in water.

While it may help you lose weight, it requires a good understanding of Volumetrics and the calorie levels of foods.

# 8. The Mayo Clinic Diet

The [Mayo Clinic Diet](#) was created by the reputable medical organization of the same name.

## How it works

Designed to be a lifestyle change over a quick fix, the Mayo Clinic Diet focuses on replacing less healthy behaviors with ones that are more likely to support longevity and weight loss.

Rather than banning certain foods, the Mayo Clinic Diet uses a pyramid to encourage exercise and illustrate quantities of foods you should be consuming.

Fruits, vegetables, and physical activity make up the base of the pyramid, followed by carbs in the next layer, then protein and dairy, fats, and finally, sweets.

The diet consists of two phases. An initial, 2-week phase designed to kick-start your weight loss by introducing 5 healthier habits and encouraging you to break 5 common less healthy habits.

The second phase is more of a lifestyle change designed to be followed long-term, encouraging education about nutritious food choices and portion sizes in addition to being physically active.

## Health benefits

Little research is available about the health benefits of the Mayo Clinic Diet.

However, the Mayo Clinic tells users to expect about 10 pounds of weight loss during the first 2 weeks, and up to 2 pounds during the second phase.



Since diets rich in fiber can increase satiety by making you feel more full, the Mayo Clinic Diet may contribute to weight loss. It may also decrease your risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Additionally, studies show that exercising while on a lower-calorie diet is more effective at promoting weight loss than dieting alone.

However, more research is needed to determine the effectiveness of the Mayo Clinic Diet for weight loss.

## Downsides

While the digital version of the program includes meal plans, recipes, a food tracker, virtual group sessions, at-home workouts, and more, it will cost you monthly to buy into the program.

### SUMMARY

The Mayo Clinic Diet utilizes an easy-to-follow pyramid to encourage exercise and a diet rich in fruits and vegetables.

While creators tell followers of the diet to expect about 10 pounds of weight loss during the first 2 weeks, more research needs to be done to fully understand its health benefits.

## 9. Low carb diets

Low carb diets are among the most popular diets for weight loss. Examples include the Atkins diet, ketogenic (keto) diet, and low carb, high fat (LCHF) diet.

[Some varieties](#) reduce carbs more drastically than others. For instance, very low carb diets like the keto diet restrict this macronutrient to under 10% of total calories, compared with 30% or less for other types.

## How it works

Low carb diets restrict your carb intake in favor of protein and fat.

They're typically higher in protein than low fat diets, which is important, as protein can help curb your appetite, raise your metabolism, and conserves muscle mass.

In very low carb diets like keto, your body begins using fatty acids rather than carbs for energy by converting them into ketones. This process is called [ketosis](#).

## Health benefits

Research suggests that low carb diets may reduce risk factors for heart disease, including high cholesterol and blood pressure levels. They may also improve blood sugar and insulin levels in people with type 2 diabetes.

Many studies indicate that low carb diets can aid weight loss and may be more effective than conventional low fat diets.

For example, a review of 53 studies made up of 68,128 participants found that low carb diets resulted in significantly more weight loss than low fat diets.

What's more, low carb diets appear to be quite effective at burning harmful belly fat.

## Downsides

In some cases, a low carb diet may raise LDL (bad) cholesterol levels. Very low carb diets can also be difficult to follow and cause digestive upset in some people.

In very rare situations, following a very low carb diet may cause a condition known as ketoacidosis, a dangerous metabolic condition that can be fatal if left untreated.

## SUMMARY

Low carb diets restrict your carb intake, which encourages your body to use more fat as fuel.

They can help you lose weight and offer many other benefits.

# The bottom line

Many diets can [help you lose weight](#) and offer unique health benefits.

Some of the most popular eating plans include the Mediterranean diet, WW (Weight Watchers), the MIND diet, the DASH diet, intermittent fasting, plant-based diets, low carb diets, the Mayo Clinic Diet, and the Volumetrics diet.

While all of the above diets have been shown to be effective for weight loss, the diet you choose should depend on your lifestyle and food preferences. This ensures that you are more likely to stick to it in the long term.

And before starting any kind of new diet, it's always a good idea to talk with your doctor about your personal health history. They can help you decide which plan would work best for you.

Additionally, once you've decided to start a new diet, a registered dietitian can help you navigate the new rules and help you plan meals that you actually want to eat.