



Evaluating diets

You might be thinking about trying a new diet or healthy eating program. Most people focus on how healthy the plan is but it's important to understand that the healthiest possible diet in the world is ultimately useless to you if you can't keep it up long-term.

Ask yourself 'How sustainable is this diet?'



Cost

Will you need to spend money on supplements, powders, or expensive ingredients in order to follow the diet? Can you afford this long-term?



Lifestyle impact

How will following this diet impact things such as socialising with friends, family meals or eating when away from home?



Flexibility

How much freedom do you have to make food choices? What happens when unexpected things happen, like getting home late from work?



Time

Will you need to spend a lot of time shopping for and preparing special ingredients or meals? Is this realistic for you long-term?



Enjoyment

Does this diet sound like something you'd actually be happy to follow long term? If your favourite foods are off-limits, how likely is it you'll stick to this diet?



Cues

Are you encouraged to follow your body's cues, or follow the diet's rules? The less control you have in terms of when you eat and how much, the harder it will be to continue.

Most diets offer the same plan for everyone, and this might work for some people but it doesn't work for most. We're all different, so the more rigid a diet is, the less it's like to work for you.



Evaluating diets

What about diets which have been scientifically researched?

Often, diets gain popularity because they've been the subject of scientific research. The media loves to publicise promising results from studies, but these results might not tell the full story. Here are some questions to ask when reading about a diet study:



Who were the participants?

Results from a study of young men might not be the same for different populations, such as older women. Likewise, results from a study of healthy people might not be the same for people with different health conditions.



What was the dropout rate?

If a large portion of the study participants dropped out, it tells you that the diet was hard to follow.



How much intervention occurred?

Results from a study where the participants were given all their meals might not be the same for you preparing your own meals at home. Results from a study where the participants had regular access to a dietitian and exercise physiologist might not be the same for you doing it by yourself.



How long was the follow-up period?

Short-term results (eg. 6-12 months) are likely to be more positive than results seen with a longer follow-up, when most people have discontinued the diet and returned to what they were doing before.

Most people discontinue their diet within the first year of starting. This isn't your fault: diets just don't work! Remember, it's in the diet industry's best interests to keep you coming back.