

## NAVIGATING TRENDING DIETS

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### Introduction

There is not a universal approach to diet that satisfies all nutritional requirements and long-term health goals. For many people, the word “diet” has many negative thoughts and feelings attached to it. However, diet simply means what a person eats. In order to meet health goals and make lasting changes to a lifestyle, healthy diet choices must be maintained and customized to an individual’s needs. Many people may have trouble selecting the right diet for their needs because of conflicting information surrounding popularized diets. To further complicate the issue, many may begin a trendy diet without understanding the impacts it can have on their body. The purpose of most diets is to achieve weight loss, but individual diets have their own unique method of reaching this shared goal. What may be well-suited for certain individuals could be dangerous for others. In addition, some diets may be helpful in initiating weight loss but not realistic to continue over time. As always, remember to talk to a doctor before beginning a new diet; physicians can explain potential risks and benefits specifically related to an individual’s body.



What should I eat?  
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### Diet Comparison Table

The table below highlights fast facts concerning two diets increasing in popularity: intermittent fasting and the DASH diet.

Diet	What is it?	Considerations	A Meal Example
Intermittent Fasting	<p>An eating style characterized by only consuming food during a set period of time each day. The remainder of the day is spent fasting (not eating).</p> <p>Example of “16/8”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8-hour Eating Period: 11 AM – 7 PM</li> </ul>	<p>This pattern of eating can cause an increase in cortisol (stress hormones), higher LDL (bad cholesterol), low blood sugar, pancreas issues, and problems regulating energy.</p>	<p>If eating period is from 11 AM to 7 PM, an example of a meal for this schedule would be:</p> <p>Eating Period:</p> <p>At 11 AM, eat:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avocado Ricotta Toast</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 16-hour Fasting Period: 7 PM – 11 AM</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 cooked egg</li> <li>• 1 cup of blueberries</li> </ul> <p>Fasting period:</p> <p>Beginning at 7 PM, only drink water</p>
DASH Diet (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension)	<p>Diet focused on eating fresh fruits and vegetables; also including more lean protein, healthy fats, and low-sodium foods.</p> <p>There is a particular emphasis on lowering blood pressure and LDL levels.</p> <p>In combination with daily exercise, this diet may result in weight loss.</p>	<p>It is a difficult diet to maintain due to the restriction of processed foods.</p> <p>This pattern of eating may not be suitable for those who have chronic kidney diseases.</p> <p>Those who are on medicines for hypertension should also take extra caution.</p>	<p>An example of a meal for dinner could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grilled chicken kebab with onions and peppers (low-sodium seasoning)</li> <li>• 1 cup of wild rice</li> <li>• 1 cup of mixed berries</li> </ul>

## What is Intermittent Fasting?

Intermittent fasting is an eating style focused on when food is eaten rather than the types of foods consumed. For example, in the “16/8” intermittent fasting plan, food can be consumed between a designated 8 hours of a 24-hour period; the rest of the day must be used for fasting (i.e., eat between 11 AM – 7 PM, fast 7 PM – 11 AM). Instead of using foods eaten throughout an entire day as the major energy source, intermittent fasting triggers weight loss by using stored fat as the primary energy source. When the body is not receiving food for a certain period of time (the fasting period), there is very little sugar in the blood coming from external sources. According to the University of Michigan Health, decreasing insulin levels cause cells to release stored glucose as energy, which becomes one of the main energy sources for the body during periods of fasting. Once the blood glucose from cells is gone, stored fats are also broken down, resulting in smaller fat cells. When this process is repeated over a long period of time, it can result in large amounts of weight loss.

While there is evidence for weight loss in certain cases, intermittent fasting can also come with many complications. Individuals who are fasting tend to experience low blood sugar (hypoglycemia) due to long periods during the day with no food intake. During fasting periods, there is often a lag between the energy that the body needs immediately and the process of breaking down fat or retrieving stored sugar from cells for energy. According to the Mayo Clinic, low blood sugar causes many symptoms, such as an irregular or fast heartbeat, fatigue, pale skin, shakiness, and sweating. Furthermore, after prolonged periods of fasting, the body’s cortisol levels can increase. Cortisol is a hormone that naturally occurs in the body and is associated with the body’s response to stress. When the body is in a period of fasting, it is in “survival mode,” and the body naturally responds to make up for the lack of available sugar in the blood. Essentially, the body interprets fasting as starving and produces more cortisol to increase blood sugar as an energy source to the muscles and organ systems. According to the Mayo Clinic, increased cortisol levels can cause long-term issues such as anxiety, depression, digestive problems, headaches, heart disease, sleep problems, weight gain, memory, and concentration impairment. In addition, following

fasting, there are generally increased levels of low-density lipoprotein (LDL), the bad kind of cholesterol. While LDL levels may eventually return to normal, this could be an issue for individuals with high blood pressure or pre-existing high cholesterol levels. Evidence shows that insulin resistance can increase after long periods of fasting; this increase can cause further issues with sugar regulation that may lead to more complications. Insulin resistance occurs when the body's cells do not respond properly to insulin or allow sugar to exit the blood and enter the cells, resulting in a buildup of sugar in the blood.

For individuals living with type 2 diabetes, blood sugar regulation is already difficult. Compromised blood sugar regulation and insulin resistance combined with Intermittent Fasting could make diabetes management even more challenging.

## What is the DASH Diet?

The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension diet is an eating pattern that has two primary targets: limit the daily intake of sodium and increase the consumption of healthy fats and proteins. Eating more fruits and vegetables with the DASH diet also helps in providing several vitamins and minerals important for essential processes in the body. The risk of high blood pressure and other heart diseases is greatly reduced by limiting the amount of sodium entering the body. Individuals who follow the DASH diet have also experienced lower LDL levels.

The DASH diet can be thought of as a ripple effect. When someone is eating more whole foods and less processed foods, they will begin to see positive changes throughout the body. When following the DASH diet, it can reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes and offer additional help as a management tool for diabetes too. Although this diet is not necessarily focused on weight loss as much as reducing blood pressure, weight loss can be experienced with the addition of a daily exercise regimen and portion control.

While there are many benefits of this heavily studied diet, there are also things to consider before beginning DASH. A study of DASH concluded that people with chronic kidney or liver diseases should exercise extreme caution with the diet. People who are currently taking medicine daily to treat high blood pressure should also be careful when considering this diet. As with any diet, it can be very difficult to maintain due to the restriction of processed foods.

## Things to Consider

Every body is similar – yet different – which means that all diets are not suitable for all people. Individuals may have an underlying medical condition, take medication, or experience personal preferences (taste, cost, etc.) that prevent a specific diet from being a healthy or sustainable choice. Diets can be helpful in initiating change, but long-term healthy eating is most important for maintaining positive lifestyle changes and maximizing health benefits. When considering different diets, make an informed choice by examining reputable sources of information. Think critically about the information presented and always talk with your doctor first before making any changes related to diet.

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## **Author(s)**

**Peyton Sutley**, PHS Student Intern, Clemson University

**Emma Walker**, UPIC Student Intern, Clemson University

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