

## MAIL TODAY

BY MANU MOUDGIL

**WE CAN BLAME** Kareena Kapoor, Beyonce and even Jennifer Aniston for making crash diets so popular.

While one advocates soya milk and cabbage, the other says Maple syrup is the answer. The weight loss of celebrities is publicised widely enough but what no one talks about is the impact of their crash diets on their bodies. The reality is that crash diets are very, very bad for the health.

Apart from the fact that the weight loss is momentary, fad diets also increase the risk of blood pressure problems, coronary heart disease, impact the eyes adversely and deplete the bones too. They disturb the natural metabolism of the body, making it harder to both lose weight and keep the weight off. Being on a low-calorie diet creates an imbalance in minerals and electrolytes, which impacts nerve and muscle functioning and also creates a dip in the level of serotonin in the brain, leading to clinical depression. Women are more likely to experience anaemia and irregular periods and may also find the health of their hair, nails and skin deteriorating. Diets that advocate low carbohydrates create a condition called ketosis in the body, which is very harsh on kidneys. Since carbs are also the main energy source for your body and mind, eating less than what the body requires results in low energy and can even affect your mental faculties.

The worst part of going on a crash diet is a self-defeating exercise. "The weight always bounces back. I have never met anybody who has been able to maintain the weight loss achieved from crash dieting," says wellness expert Dr Shikha Sharma.

### TACKLING THE MIND-SET

**THOSE STRUGGLING** with their weight tend to develop an obsessive attitude to food. Since eating normally becomes less and less of a possibility, crash diets become the norm. But the structure of a diet requires you to spend the entire day focusing on food and calories, which only aggravates the obsession, leading to a potential eating disorder. "Overeating and crash dieting are both obsessive behaviours which stem from the mind rather than the belly. Dieters either overeat or go on fasting. It's more to do with their thinking and crash diets seem to appeal to this mind set," explains Dr. Sharma.

### HIGH FAT, LOW CARBOHYDRATE

**AGE-OLD** wisdom says overweight people should avoid eating fat. But diet gurus continue to brush aside this idea. From the Atkins to the Zone diet, many fad diets advocate a cut back on carbohydrates and a subsequent increase in protein and fatty food to satisfy satiety. Fatty foods are supposed to cater to hunger better than low fat foods. The carbohydrate content of these diets is derived from vegetables and sal-

ads rather than breads and pasta. Diet gurus claim that the low-carb diet switches the body's metabolism from burning glucose as fuel to burning stored body fat.

But scientific studies debunk this argument and conclude that there is no such metabolic advantage to this diet plan. The fact is that animal proteins

are loaded with cholesterol and saturated fat, and many who choose this diet plan experience elevated cholesterol levels

which clog the arteries and may cause heart attack and stroke. The liver continuously tries to digest protein, gets overloaded and increases the body's susceptibility to infections like

typhoid and jaundice. The kidneys also work extra hard and are prone to damage.

"This is not the best way to lose weight since you end up putting up more weight when you get back to normal eating," says Geetika Ahluwalia, chief dietitian, Delhi Heart and Lung Institute. One of the reasons may be an increase in water loss during the initial phase of the diet, according to a study published in the Journal *Obesity Research*. Another study points out that minor problems like diarrhoea, general weakness, rashes and muscle cramps are frequent among

the low-carb dieters.

Take the case of Purna Verma, who has been on an extreme version of this type of diet, the eggs-only diet. She ate seven eggs a day and managed to shed around 10 kg in a month. But the impact of this on her health has landed her in the Delhi Heart and Lung Institute. Her cholesterol has shot up, bowel movements are on slow mode and the lack of nutrients has created malnutrition and consequent fatigue. "Eggs contain zero carbohydrates, which is the main energy source for our body and brain," says Ahluwalia.

# WHY DIETS

# CRASH

(AND HOW TO CHOOSE ONE THAT DOESN'T)

Crash diets may attract you with their promise of a 5 kg loss in 10 days but the harsh reality is that they can damage your heart and kidneys and alter your metabolism adversely. Here we examine the health impact of popular diets and feature the weight management principles of some experts



## WEIGHT MANAGEMENT IS THE SOLUTION

**HAVING ESTABLISHED** that crash diets are unhealthy, the question remains: What is the best way to lose weight after all? Successful solutions seem to range from portion control to regular exercise, to vigilance about what a person puts into his or her mouth.

### CONTROL PORTIONS



Weight management comes naturally to Honey Khanna, a nutritionist with Max Hospital. She is aware of what helps her body and what does not. But still she tends to get off the track occasionally. "During marriages and festivities, I can't really resist eating out and there is an increase of around 3 kg. However, for me a 45-minute walk daily and portion control helps. I eat all my meals on time for better digestion," she says. In a day, Honey takes 5-6 small meals to keep herself going. "I eat at regular intervals but the amount is less. This way my body gets time to digest properly," Honey says. A study in *Obesity Research* journal says obese patients on portion control for two years lose five per cent or more of their baseline weight.

### EAT WHOLE GRAINS

For Dr Shikha Sharma, however, the right food rather than portion control does the trick. Juggling several involvements including a chain of wellness clinics and diet helpline centres can be stressful. "You tend to put on weight when you are anxious. I keep getting involved in new projects so my stress levels are high and I have to watch what I eat as I can gain upto 5 kg under these circumstances," she confesses. Dr Shikha does yoga to keep stress at bay, and cuts back on rich food to lose weight. "To lose weight, I stick to the traditional Indian meal of whole grains. I avoid refined food or junk food and my weight gets back to normal in a couple of months," she asserts.



### CUT DOWN ON FAT



Geetika Ahluwalia blames vacations for her weight gain. "One is relaxed on a vacation. I start imagining that I must be burning lots of calories since I am travelling and sight-seeing and end up eating fattening food. I usually gain 3 kg during a vacation," she says. Ahluwalia says she sheds this weight by cutting down fatty food. "I also try to do a 45 minute walk, but I am a bit lazy for that. It's the food that does the trick for me. I cut down on oil, chocolate and junk food. The weight does take its own time to go but eventually it does if you manage your diet well," she says.

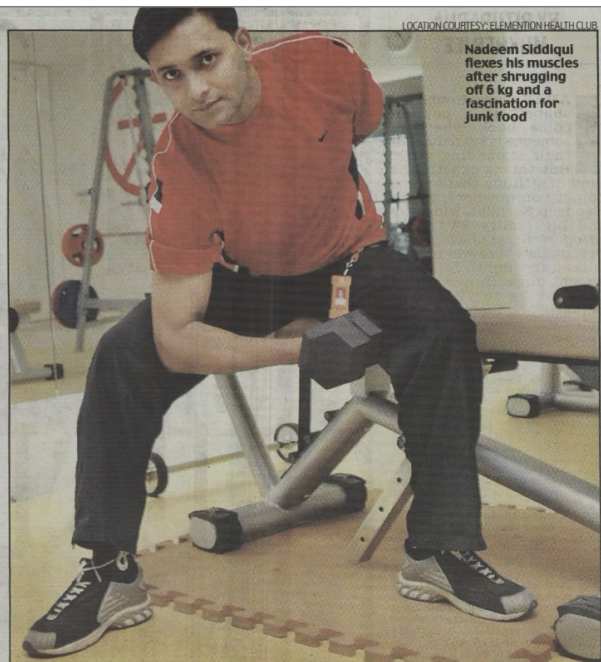


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Kiran Sawhney lost 30 kg with exercise and right food

RAHUL IRANI



LOCATION: COURTESY: ELEMENTION HEALTH CLUB

Nadeem Siddiqui flexes his muscles after shuffling off 6 kg and a fascination for junk food

### SINGLE FOOD AND DETOX DIETS

MILLIONS of dieters across the globe are familiar with the diet developed by the General Motors Company for its employees in the mid 1980s. It's a one-week plan with a separate food strategy for each day. On day one you take only fruit, the next day is for vegetables and the third for bananas and milk. Experts say that eating exclusive food puts the dieter at risk of facing deficiencies. A single food diet, besides being low calorie, fills you up with a single nutrient which is not



helpful for all of the body's functions. The cabbage soup diet, for instance, is too low in carbohydrates, protein, vitamins and minerals to continue for an extended period of time. "You load yourself with only one kind of food for a length of time. While the food may not be bad in itself, unfortunately we can't supply nutrients in installments on different days because the body needs all nutrients at one time to function effectively," explains Ahluwalia. Such a low energy diet forces the body to hold back the fat reserve and burns muscle for the energy needed for daily activity. Second and subsequent attempts at weight loss become more and more difficult because the basic metabolic rate at which the body burns calories slows down. Following this diet repeatedly can deplete the body of energy and some important nutrients. Detox diets may also reduce energy levels. Advocates of these diets say the process of detoxifica-

tion can help remove toxins from the body, resulting in weight loss and improved health. Detox plans range from a raw food and liquid only diet to colonic irrigation and fasting. The foods allowed and banned can vary widely, but generally fruit, vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds, herbal teas and massive amounts of water are allowed. In contrast, wheat, dairy, meat, fish, eggs, caffeine, alcohol, salt, sugar and processed food – in fact, most of the food that many of us love – are banned. Strict detox diets followed in the long term can lead to nutrient deficiencies and health problems. By eliminating dairy products from your diet, for instance, it's hard to meet the body's needs for calcium, a mineral that's needed for strong bones and teeth. And in the long term, a deficiency of calcium can lead to osteoporosis or brittle bone disease. Some people also experience side effects like tiredness, fever and headache while on these kind of diets.

From a scientific standpoint, however, there's little proof to support the claims that detox diets work. "It's fine to fast or go on a detox diet for a day every once in a while. But this should not be considered a weight loss plan," says Honey Khanna, consultant dietician, Max Hospital.

### EXERCISE CREATES A TURN AROUND

A WELL known name in the field of fitness today, Kiran Sawhney recalls a time in her

life when she wasn't health conscious. "I was always a little plump and never bothered about exercise or food. But after marriage and delivering two babies, my weight just shot up. It was a combined effect of metabolism getting sluggish with age and mindless eating," she says.

The turnaround came when Kiran joined an aerobics class. "I was determined to lose weight and loved aerobics. This has made me very conscious of my diet and exercise regime," she says. Kiran works out for an hour daily, for 5 days a week. "I do cardio, strength training, core training, yoga, pilates, tai chi and I love dancing. My food is very well balanced with lots of protein and less of fat. I don't take junk food or aerated drinks," the 40-year-old says. Kiran has lost a whopping 30 kg and has managed her weight successfully for the past decade.

Nadeem Siddiqui is another turnaround story of fitness. A young professional with a life full of stress, junk food and lack of exercise, Nadeem was always on the heavier side. Waking up late, he would take a heavy breakfast of *paranthis* and rush to office. Being on a field job meant he rarely got regular lunch. "I used to satisfy my hunger with a burger and a cold drink rather than a proper meal. The mindless eating and almost nil exercise made me put on weight. In addition, I was bedridden for four months due to a leg fracture which again expanded my girth," Nadeem says. This was three years ago.

An inspiration from a cousin who was a fitness trainer helped Nadeem get hold of his life and now he is a trainer at Elemention Health Club. "I have lost six kg and now whatever body weight I have is because of muscle mass. I do weight training for one hour per day and cardio once a week. There is minimal of fat in my food since I take more of green vegetables, *chappitis*, *dal*, grilled chicken and fish," he explains.

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### FAT-BURNING FOOD

Citrus fruits like, oranges, grapefruit, and lemons contain high concentrations of Vitamin C which has a fat-burning quality. Vitamin C reduces the effectiveness of fat and can dilute it. This helps the body flush out fat from the system easily. By adding citrus fruits to your daily diet, you will greatly increase your metabolism and also control the cholesterol levels.

