

DANGERS OF CRASH DIETS



In the simplest terms, the word 'diet' means a pattern of eating. But in every-day language it's used to describe a pattern of eating that has a particular aim, like weight loss or eliminating particular foods (eg. Vegetarian or gluten-free diet).

LiveLighter recommends healthy, balanced eating, enjoyment of food and healthy eating habits that last into the future. LiveLighter does not promote unsupervised, extreme or fad diets.

Some extreme diets restrict food intake to a level that leaves a person constantly hungry and lacking the nutrients they need to maintain physical health and energy levels. These are often called 'fad' or 'crash' diets because they are so restrictive that they are usually only followed for a short time.

Crash dieting and health

Regular crash dieting can affect both physical and mental health and has little effect on weight. Ninety-five percent of people who go on weight loss diets regain everything they have lost plus more in two years.

Bad breath, fatigue, over-eating, headaches/muscle cramps, constipation, sleep disturbance and loss of bone density are just some of the effects extreme dieting can have on our bodies.

Extreme dieting can be linked with a poor body image and is a risk factor for the development of an eating disorder.

Why crash dieting doesn't work

Extreme dieting that doesn't provide enough energy can reduce the body's metabolism (the rate that it burns energy). This makes it harder to lose weight. Healthy metabolism usually returns with normal eating.

Most crash weight-loss diets are very restrictive and leave people feeling constantly hungry. People can often ignore this hunger for a short time but such deprivation often leads to powerful food cravings and over-compensating with behaviours like bingeing.

This can result in feelings of guilt, blame and failure which take a major toll on self-esteem. This cycle can continue throughout a person's life and is a risk factor in the development of an eating disorder.

Crash diets and disordered eating

Disordered eating refers to a wide range of abnormal eating behaviours, such as chronic restrained eating, compulsive eating and habitual dieting. Behaviours or relationships with food which are obsessive, irregular or chaotic may fall under the category of disordered eating when they cause a level of discomfort or disruption to a person's life.

Disordered eating patterns may lead to fatigue, depression, malnutrition or decreased concentration, depending on the nature of the behaviour.

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Mindful Eating

Mindful eating is a skill which can help people to enjoy a healthy, positive and enjoyable relationship with food. Put simply, mindful eating is the opposite of mindless eating. Some contributors to mindless eating include: eating in response to emotions, eating in front of a television or while multitasking, eating to relieve boredom or tiredness and not recognising the difference between hungry and non-hungry eating.

The mindful eating approach uses strategies such as:

- ▲ Being aware of the positive and nurturing qualities of food preparation and eating
- ▲ Choosing to eat food that is both pleasing and nourishing to the body by using your senses to explore, savour and taste
- ▲ Being aware of physical hunger and satiety cues to guide decisions to start and stop eating

For more information about mindful eating visit the Eating Disorders Victoria website at www.eatingdisorders.org.au

Where to get help

If you have concerns about dieting, a negative relationship with food or your mental health the following professionals and organisations can help:

- ▲ A doctor (preferably with experience in disordered eating)
- ▲ Psychologist or counsellor (with experience in the area of disordered eating)
- ▲ Dietitians Association of Australia
Tel. 1800 812 942 or visit www.daa.asn.au
- ▲ Eating Disorders Victoria Helpline
Tel. 1300 550 236 or visit www.eatingdisorders.org.au
(who can provide support and direct you to experienced health professionals)

This fact sheet has been developed in partnership with Eating Disorders Victoria. Material used in this fact sheet has been adapted with permission from Eating Disorders Victoria fact sheets.