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# LIFESTYLE DIARIES

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## NUTRITIONAL TRENDS 101: The truth behind popular diets

With a surge in awareness about the impact of food on our well-being, people are turning to diets not just to look good, but also to feel good. In the ever-evolving landscape of nutritional science, fad diets such as Intermittent Fasting, the Keto (Ketogenic) diet, and the GM diet, among others, have garnered noteworthy attention for their promises of rapid weight loss and health improvements.

The true effectiveness of these diets, along with their advantages and disadvantages, warrants a comprehensive examination. Dietary needs are greatly individualised and influenced by a myriad of factors including age, weight, height, and overall health condition. A diet plan that works wonders for one person might not be as effective, or even advisable, for another.

### EFFECTIVENESS OF POPULAR DIETS

Fad diets often promise rapid weight loss or health improvements within a short period and they usually involve strict rules, limiting certain foods or food groups, such as

carbohydrates or fats.

Chowdhury Tasneem Hasin, Chief Clinical Dietician and Head of the Department of Dietetics and Nutrition at the United Hospital highlights the considerations individuals should make when adopting fad diets.

While these diets can serve as a stepping stone towards a healthier lifestyle, they should be approached with caution. A more balanced and sustainable approach to nutrition involves understanding the unique needs of one's body and embracing dietary choices that align with long-term well-being.

That said, whether it's the ketogenic diet championing high-fat, low-carb consumption, or the intermittent fasting trend promoting scheduled eating windows, each diet claims its own unique set of advantages and disadvantages.

### INTERMITTENT FASTING: TIMING YOUR EATING WINDOW

Presently, intermittent fasting has emerged as a popular dietary strategy. The primary idea of intermittent fasting is to cycle between periods of eating and fasting, allowing the body to experience a variety of metabolic changes. In the 16/8 method, you fast for 16 hours each day and restrict eating to an 8-hour window e.g., if you finish your last meal at 8 PM, you would start eating again at noon the next day.



According to Hasin, "Ideally, intermittent fasting helps to lose weight and the main principle of intermittent fasting is metabolic switching. However, I would suggest losing weight by having a healthy diet plan — incorporating low-fat, low-carb foods and fruits and vegetables in your meal plan. I would not recommend intermittent fasting to those who have kidney or blood sugar issues and hormonal disorders as it can be a big risk factor for them."

Her advice illustrates the critical need for personalised diet plans, taking into account individual health conditions rather than blindly following trends.

### GM DIET: A TEMPORARY FIX

The GM diet (General Motors Diet Plan) is known for its 7-day plan, which cycles through different food groups and can

indeed prompt quick weight loss. However, Hasin warns of its shortcomings, particularly in meeting the Regular Dietary Allowance (RDA) for individuals.

"Although the GM diet may help you to lose weight rapidly," she states, pointing out the risk of dehydration and vitamin-mineral deficiency due to the diet's restrictive nature. Some days might be high in certain nutrients while completely lacking in others, leading to an unbalanced intake throughout the week.

The appeal of the GM diet often lies in its variety, aiming to prevent monotony over its short course. Yet, Hasin emphasises, "A GM diet is a temporary diet plan to reduce weight, as in most cases, people after giving up the GM diet plan quickly gain the lost weight."

She advises that the diet might be considered for short-term goals, but it does not offer a sustainable or healthy long-term eating strategy.

### THE KETOGENIC (KETO) DIET: NOT FOR EVERYONE

Initially developed for individuals with neurological conditions such as epilepsy or autism, the Keto diet focuses on high-fat, low-carbohydrate intake to induce a state of ketosis.

"The main target of the Keto diet is to slow down brain function, especially for those who have a little agitated brain," Hasin explains. However, she cautions that the diet's restrictive nature and its effects are not necessary or beneficial for everyone, particularly those without such medical conditions.

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