

The Chocolate diet – could it work for you?

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Many people agree that “No diets don’t work”, at least not long-term. Then why do we keep doing them?

The answer is relatively simple...

Follow a strict diet for a short period and chances are you will lose weight. So you think “Wow, this diet works!”



Wrong.

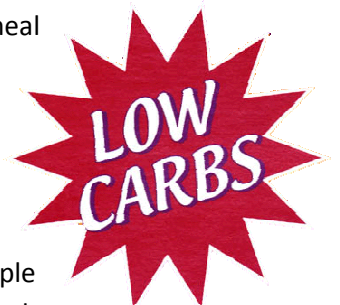
What has worked is not ‘the diet’, but the sudden reduction in kilojoule (calorie) intake. Take my chocolate diet; if all you ate for 10 days was 5 regular size (60g) chocolate bars a day, that’s a chocolate bar for breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks, you would most likely drop a kilo or two. Not because chocolate has special properties, but because you are only eating ~5000 kilojoules (1200 calories) a day. *I am not for a second recommending you so this as it is not healthy and your teeth may start falling out!*

So why am I proposing this chocolate diet? To illustrate that it is the reduction in kilojoules, often to around 5000kJ per day that is the reason most diets such as ‘detox diets’ and ‘low carb, high protein diets’ appear to work. Simply put, they work because you are eating less food energy. What is the problem with this? For a diet to really work, it has to help you lose weight and keep it off for the rest of your life. I have been practising as a dietitian for 6 years and in that time I have seen hundreds of people who have been on various diets (usually more than one type) over their life. In every single instance, weight has been reduced on a diet and then regained once the diet was stopped. Sound familiar?

While this may not come as a surprise to you, after all most of us realise weight is regained once a diet is stopped, the question still remains: **Why then do people continue to follow diets?** Again, the answer is relatively simple...

5 reasons people choose to follow diets:

1. They don’t require lifestyle change. You can continue to sleep in and relax in front of the TV after a hard day’s work as you don’t need to find time to do weekly meal planning, food shopping or cooking.
2. Many diets cut out carbs (breads & cereals) and many people mistakenly believe eating too many carbs is their main reason for weight gain.
3. Often people want to lose weight by a given time such as 10kg for a wedding or milestone birthday and they need to do this in a few months.
4. Diets are promoted everywhere; in the media, in chemists, by successful people (celebrities, some doctors and some health professionals) and with entire books dedicated to them, they must work!
5. Diets side step the complexity of behaviour change and dealing with the often uncomfortable issues around eating behaviours which requires understanding a person’s psychology.



If any of these reasons sound familiar to you, then you need to change the way you think about what is involved in looking after your health. You need to stop looking for the “silver bullet” or easy option and start taking action to ensure you are doing everything in your power to care for your body. Interestingly, many

people appear to have more concern for the 'health' of their car than their body. If you regularly service your car, make sure you put the right petrol in and avoid cheap nasty engine oil, then why not treat your body with the same respect?

The trick to losing weight and keep it off long-term.

Follow these 3 simple steps and you can't go wrong:

1. Plan your meals and snacks for the week, write a shopping list and do a weekly shop to buy everything on your shopping list.
2. Designate some time to cook meals for the week, this way you don't have to cook every night, and prepare your lunch and snacks each day before work (or the night before).
3. Keep a detailed food diary so you are fully aware of everything you eat and drink over the day. If you haven't done this before, you will find it an eye opening experience!



Top 3 reasons for not being able to plan and cook healthy meals and the solution:

1. *No point cooking for one.* **Solution:** the great thing about only having to worry about yourself is you only need to worry about cooking on 2 or 3 nights. If each recipe makes 4-6 serves, you have pre-cooked ready to eat healthy meals for several lunches and dinners.
2. *Don't always know if I am going to be home.* **Solution:** Plan for at least 4 meals, even if you have left-over food, you can use it the following week or freeze left-over cooked food. If you are eating out more than 3 meals a week, then perhaps you need to reconsider your level of social commitment or ensure that you make healthy choices.
3. *Have never meal planned and wouldn't know where to start.* **Solution:** Give it a go! Grab a blank piece paper, jot down the days your home for dinner, pick 2-3 healthy recipes such as a pasta Bolognese or chicken casserole (from internet, recipe books or my recipes www.figureate.com.au), write a list of ingredients, shop for them and then choose 2 nights or a weekend afternoon to cook up a storm! Portion food into separate containers and keep in fridge or freezer.



If you feel this is within your power, then go for it! Be prepared for the process to take a little time until you get used to the routine and be prepared to make a few mistakes such as under or over shopping, or burning the odd dish. Like learning any new skill, practice makes perfect. After a while, you will be meal planning, shopping and cooking just as routinely as you shower, have breakfast and clean your teeth every morning.

If you would like help to get started, or if comfort eating is a significant issue, then talk to an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) who can help you come up with a plan to start making changes and provide counselling to help manage the comfort eating. Visit the Dietitians Association of Australia www.daa.asn.au to find a dietitian near you.

Thanks for reading!

Zoe

Visit www.figureate.com.au for stacks of delicious healthy recipes, snack ideas and weight loss tips!