

## What is a *Diet*?

The word *diet* is of Greek origin and means “a manner of living,” or “way of life.”<sup>5</sup> The Oxford Learner’s Dictionary defines diet as: “The food and drink that you consume regularly.”

All living creatures on Earth need food to survive. What they eat not only determines their future health, but also their physical ability to secure future meals. For animals, birds, fish and insects, diet refers to the fresh, readily available foods in their natural surroundings. These foods fulfill each animals’ specific nutritional requirements:

- Bears forage for berries and vegetation that are in-season, and catch insects and fish when needed.
- Birds eat a variety of berries, seeds and insects, depending on the season and area.
- Squirrels eat what they can find in their environment, including fruit, plants, nuts, seeds, insects, fungi and even birds’ eggs.



## What should humans eat?

### Is there a specific diet meant for the human body?

Traditionally, humans ate a diet similar to wild animals. As Hunter/Gatherers, we foraged for fresh fruits and vegetation that were available (and safe to eat), and hunted animals or fished, depending on the region, for the rest.

Unfortunately, as we have evolved to make life easier and food more readily available, we have lost our connection to that more natural, Hunter-Gatherer way of eating. Instead, we often rely on **taste and convenience** to satisfy hunger, rather than choosing the most nutrient-dense foods to nourish us.



## The Standard “Human Diet” today

A true *human* diet is difficult to clearly define, as differences in climate, culture and traditions all have an impact on the foods we choose to eat. However, as Western technology has evolved and spread around the world, so has the Western diet. For the purpose of this discussion, it is the Standard North American diet being examined. This is still a very new type of diet, with some aspects of it dating back around 100 years (like bacon and eggs), while others are only around 40-50 years old (like breakfast cereals).<sup>1</sup>

As of 2006, **19% of the Standard North American diet** (ie: 2,000 calories/day) **came from white flour and 30% came from processed sugars.**<sup>2</sup> This is a far cry from the traditional dietary patterns we followed for generations.



## Foods Included on the Standard (North) American Diet:

- Processed, packaged, canned and fast foods
- Refined sugar (beverages, baked goods, cereals, breads)
- Meat, poultry, pork (from Factory Farms)
- Fish (from commercial fish farms)
- Refined carbohydrates (breads, pizza, chips, popcorn, fries)
- Chemical additives for flavour and preservation
- Trans Fats from heat-treated processed oils (fast food, pastries, chips)
- Stimulating drinks (coffee, lattes, energy drinks)



## Foods Excluded on the Standard (North) American Diet:

- None

The pursuit of food, for humans at least, has gone from necessary for survival to a quick trip to the local grocery store. We no longer have to worry about the seasons – strawberries are available in January, apples at Christmas, and animal protein whenever we choose. No all-day hunting required.

Our methods of food production have also evolved. As we moved from farmlands to cities during the Industrial Revolution, the need for more shelf-stable foods that could travel long distances without spoiling greatly increased. New milling methods were introduced in early 1900 to help extend the shelf-life of bread by extracting the wheat germ, which is perishable, from the grain.<sup>10,2</sup> The final product does indeed last longer, but with less of what we need in it; especially **B vitamins, minerals and vitamin E**. Breads, grains, pastas and cereals may be much more accessible today, but their nutritional content pales in comparison to the breads our great-grandparents ate.



By the 1930s the introduction of “low calorie” or “calorie counting” diets<sup>9</sup> further changed our relationship with food. People were even less interested in local, seasonal eating, with the focus shifting to **restricting foods**, especially fat and carbohydrates. These trends still persist today through programs like Weight Watchers, calorie-counting software and “health” magazines, websites and blogs.

Alongside the restrictive plans, health-promoting diets are another big trend today. Many books, websites and blogs claim to have the answer to what and how we should eat. Let’s take a closer look at a few of the more popular diets currently claiming the most health benefits: **Mediterranean, Paleo, Vegetarian, and Vegan.**

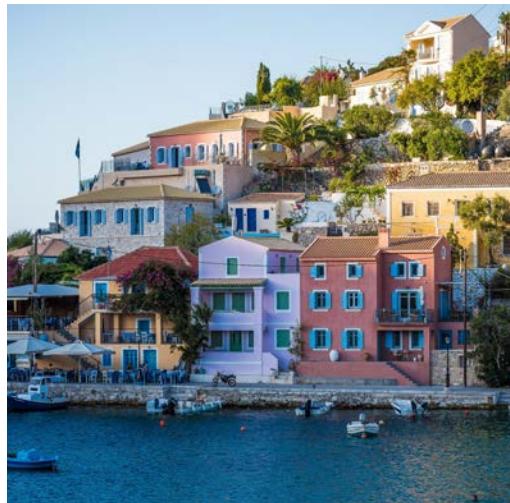


## Mediterranean Diets

This includes traditional diets from a cross section of Greece, Italy, Portugal, Southern France and Spain. The Mediterranean region overall is associated with increased vitality, longevity and preserved cognition.<sup>3</sup> There is a much greater intake of whole grains, legumes, vegetables, fruit and fresh fish; all of which are locally available due to the warmer climate.<sup>2</sup> The Mediterranean diet also includes a fair amount of olive oil, a monounsaturated fat that is less likely to be damaged by heat and has been shown to have a positive effect on blood sugar and cardiovascular health.<sup>2</sup>

### Foods Included on the Mediterranean Diet:

- ✓ Whole grains (couscous, polenta, bulgur)
- ✓ Legumes & Beans
- ✓ Vegetables (artichokes, okra, cabbage, fennel, beets)
- ✓ Fruit (dates, figs, avocados, cherries, pomegranate)
- ✓ Fresh Fish & Seafood
- ✓ Olive oil (in place of butter or margarine)



### Foods Excluded on the Mediterranean Diet:

- ✗ No real exclusions, but there is a lower intake of meat and specifically red meat, which is common for the region.<sup>2</sup>



### Possible Health Benefits:

- Removal of processed and packaged foods and sugars
- Lower rates of heart disease are associated with the Mediterranean region
- Olive oil has been shown to protect against cancer and atherosclerosis, and stabilize blood sugar
- Lower meat intake lowers saturated fat in diet

### Possible Health Issues:

- Caffeine, alcohol and late-night meals are also common in the Mediterranean, which I do not recommend.
- Possible Mercury toxicity with a higher fish intake

### Other factors to consider:

- Visiting markets frequently during the week to purchase fresh local foods is part of the culture.
- Oils are used to dip bread instead of butter or margarine.



## Paleo Diet

The Paleolithic, Paleo or “Caveman diet” involves eating only the foods that our Stone Age (or Paleolithic) ancestors would have eaten. The theory behind this diet is that the majority of Western Diseases (heart disease, cancer, etc) came with the introduction of industrialized foods. It could be argued that the Paleo way of eating is the closest to our own natural, traditional diet. However, given that many of the specific plants and animals that were available in the Stone Age have since become extinct, *true adherence* to a Paleo Diet is no longer possible. I don’t think “grass-fed, free-range Mammoth” is coming to a Whole Foods near you anytime soon! It is probably more accurate to describe Paleo as a “template,” or “guideline,” for eating, rather than a specific diet.<sup>4</sup>



### Foods Included on the Paleo Diet:

- ✓ Vegetables
- ✓ Fruit
- ✓ Nuts
- ✓ Seeds
- ✓ Animal protein (eggs, lamb, organ meat, wild game, fish + seafood)

### Foods Excluded on the Paleo Diet:

- ✗ Dairy (*some Paleo Diets include various amounts*)
- ✗ Grains (oats, wheat, barley)
- ✗ Legumes (beans, lentils, peas, peanuts)
- ✗ Processed, canned or packaged foods
- ✗ Processed sugar



### Possible Health Benefits:

- Removal of processed and packaged foods and sugars
- Higher protein intake can help balance blood-sugar
- Most of the carbohydrates are low-glycemic  
(ie: they do not spike blood sugar)
- Dietary fibre comes from vegetables instead of grains
- Moderate amount of healthy fats, better balance between Omega 3 and 6

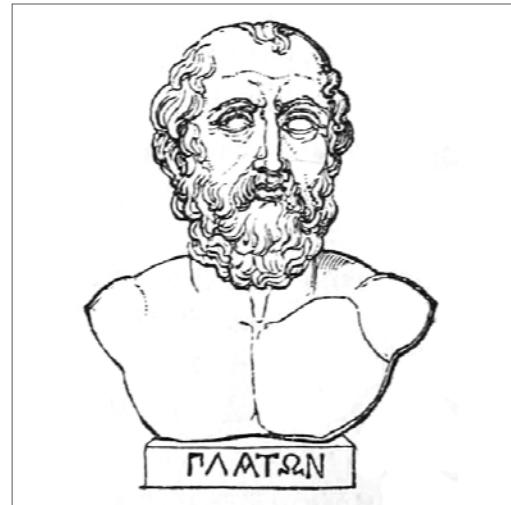


### Possible Health Issues:

- Protein intake can be too high (stresses kidneys)
- Can be acid-forming if too much protein and too few carbs

## Vegetarian Diets

Vegetarianism is one of the oldest known human diets, dating back at least to the 6th century B.C. Plato and Pythagoras were passionate vegetarians.<sup>1</sup> Even today, there are still a few cultures who eat a mostly vegetarian diet: *the Hindus, Andes Indians and Mexican Tarahumaras*. There are several different types of vegetarian diets, but the basic premise is to **avoid all animal-flesh foods**. Often a vegetarian diet is adopted for moral or religious reasons, with a strong belief that killing animals, even for food, is unethical. Others adopt a vegetarian diet for health reasons, avoiding animal proteins as these are seen to promote illness and chronic diseases. Besides the personal reasons for adopting a vegetarian diet, the foods eaten also differ.



### Foods Included on a Vegetarian Diet:

- ✓ Vegetables
- ✓ Fruit
- ✓ Nuts & Seeds
- ✓ Grains
- ✓ Legumes & Beans
- ✓ Oils (olive, coconut, hemp, flaxseed, walnut, etc)

### Foods Excluded on a Vegetarian Diet:

- ✗ Meat, Pork, Poultry + fowl
- ✗ Fish + seafood (*Pescatarians include fish*)
- ✗ Eggs (*Ovo/Lacto Vegetarians include eggs*)
- ✗ Dairy (*Ovo/Lacto Vegetarians include dairy*)



### Possible Health Benefits:

- High fibre
- Lower triglyceride and cholesterol levels (than meat-eaters)<sup>2</sup>
- Lower risk of heart diseases and cancer
- May be beneficial for Diabetes and inflammation
- Balances acidity and alkalinity in the body



### Possible Health Issues:

- When not done correctly, a Vegetarian diet can lead to deficiencies in: B12, Iron and Zinc
- Protein intake can be too low
- Dairy intake can be higher than recommended

## Variations of Vegetarian Diets

### Ovo/Lacto Vegetarians (also called “Natural Vegetarians”)

Do not consume any meat, poultry or fish, but do include eggs and dairy, as these come from the animal, but are not flesh.



### Pescatarian Diet

Similar to vegetarian, but includes fish and seafood. Traditionally thought of as part of the Mediterranean Diet, many Pescatarians now consider themselves Vegetarians.

**NOTE:** Pescatarian Diets do not have the same health issues as other Vegetarians because fish and seafood are great sources of lean protein, healthy Omega 3 fats, Iron and B12. However, there can be a risk of Mercury toxicity.<sup>8</sup>

### Raw Food or “Living-Foods” Vegetarians (also called the Hippocratic Diet)

Eat a mostly (75%) or completely raw food diet, meaning they do not cook any of their vegetables. The theory behind the raw diets is that enzymes are more readily available in raw foods and are denatured during the cooking process.

Some raw food vegetarians eat what is called a “Raw until 4” diet, where they do not eat any cooked foods until after 4:00pm. Sprouting seeds and legumes and soaking grains are a key preparation technique on this diet, as it increases nutrient content and digestibility.



## Vegan Diets

Vegan diets exclude all foods and products that have an animal source. This includes all types of meat, fish and seafood, eggs, dairy and honey. Many people who choose to be vegan do so for ethical reasons. There are also vegans who follow a Raw or Raw Until 4 diet.

### Foods Included on a Vegan Diet:

- ✓ Vegetables
- ✓ Fruit
- ✓ Nuts (including nut milks and butters)
- ✓ Seeds
- ✓ Grains
- ✓ Legumes
- ✓ Oils (olive, coconut, hemp, flaxseed, walnut, etc.,)



### Foods Excluded on a Vegan Diet:

- ✗ Meat, Pork, Poultry + fowl
- ✗ Fish + seafood
- ✗ Dairy
- ✗ Honey (*some Vegans eat honey, but not all*)



### Possible Health Benefits:

- Lower risk of cancer
- Lower risk of heart diseases
- May be beneficial for Diabetes and inflammation

### Possible Health Issues:

- When not done correctly, a Vegan diet can lead to deficiencies in: B12, Iron, Calcium and Zinc<sup>8</sup>
- Protein intake can be too low
- Can be high in soy, especially refined, which can cause Estrogen Dominance in some people<sup>8</sup>

**NOTE:** It is possible to be a “junk food” vegan, consuming only vegan food-products (ie: animal protein substitutes) with little to no fresh, whole foods. **This dietary pattern is similar to the Standard North American Diet and is not recommended.**



## How a Nutritionist Can Help

Diet can be very specific to an individual, many factors affect nutrient requirements and the types of foods that work best for you, including: your age, activity levels, physical size, and background. **There is no “one-size-fits-all” diet.**

A Nutritionist can help you determine what foods work best for you, and help you ease into a new way of eating. Nutritionists can also *Therapeutic Diet* is necessary to help promote healing any current health issues.

**Custom Meal Plans are my specialty!** I create simple, healthy & delicious 7, 14 or 30 day personalized plans - complete with grocery lists, nutritional info & where to buy resources!



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