

On nutrition: Old and new diet trends

May 13 2022, by Barbara Intermill



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This is how old I am: A few decades ago, I sat in on a nutrition debate between Dr. Dean Ornish and Dr. Robert Atkins, well-known cardiologists with polar opposite views on the best diet to lose weight and prevent heart disease. Each of the heart doctors was passionate about his diet plan, though the diets were/are in hard contrast to each other.

Ornish presented reams of research to show that a very low-fat and mostly [vegetarian diet](#) can reverse [heart disease](#) as well as improve diabetes and other chronic conditions.

In turn, Atkins provided his evidence that a low-carb [diet](#)—one that depends more on protein and fat and severely limits fruit, bread, starchy vegetables and other plant-based foods—is effective for weight loss and does not harm the heart.

Who won? In my opinion, it was the third speaker at the debate. A representative from the United States Department of Agriculture showed us evidence that both types of diets have their merits and drawbacks. He concluded with research that shows the best diet is probably somewhere in the middle.

Times haven't changed much. Just this morning, I learned of these three "new" diets:

The New Mayo Clinic Diet (as opposed to the old Mayo Clinic diet) is an improved plan for [weight loss](#), according to the medical team who developed it. What's interesting about this plan is it is not one plan. Dieters can choose their preference for healthy keto, high protein, vegetarian, Mediterranean or one that promotes gut health.

What? One plan doesn't fit all? It's true. Genetic research is beginning to show us that, based on our DNA, some of us do better on one type of diet pattern (such as vegetarian) while others do well on another (such as high protein).

Then there's the Nordic diet, ya. As you might expect, there's plenty of fish plus fruit, vegetables, nuts, seeds and oils. It's based on research in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Iceland that found improved [blood sugar](#) and [cholesterol levels](#) in volunteers who ate this way.

And have you heard of the Pegan diet? It's a cross between two pretty opposite eating plans, vegan (strict vegetarian) and paleo (meat, poultry, eggs, fish, nuts, seeds and other foods hunted or gathered by our ancient ancestors who were probably eaten by a tiger before they had a chance to really study this diet, but whatever).

Is it me, or are we finally learning that the real answer to optimal health is to choose a variety of all foods in the right balance? That's what current research tells us. No one dietary pattern is best for everyone. Just make sure it includes foods from each nutrient group: protein, veggies, fruit, grains and dairy (which includes fortified soy products).

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