

Fad Diets and Eating Disorders

Miracle Pill Burns Off Fat!" "Melt Fat Away While You Sleep!" You have probably seen headlines like these. They appear in ads in magazines, subways and buses, and on billboards. They promise quick and easy solutions to weight problems.

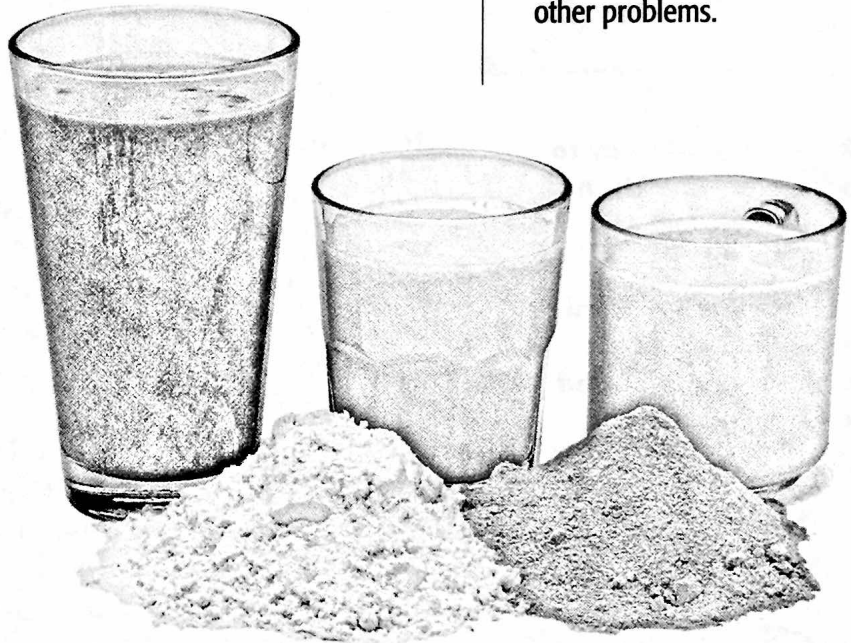
In this lesson, you will examine the risks of fad diets and other quick weight-loss strategies.

HEALTH TERMS

weight cycling
anorexia nervosa
bulimia nervosa

HEALTH CONCEPTS

- Weight control requires self-discipline and commitment. There are no shortcuts.
- Be wary of any diet or weight-loss scheme that promises to take off pounds in an abnormally short time period or without any effort.
- Eating disorders are symptoms of other problems.

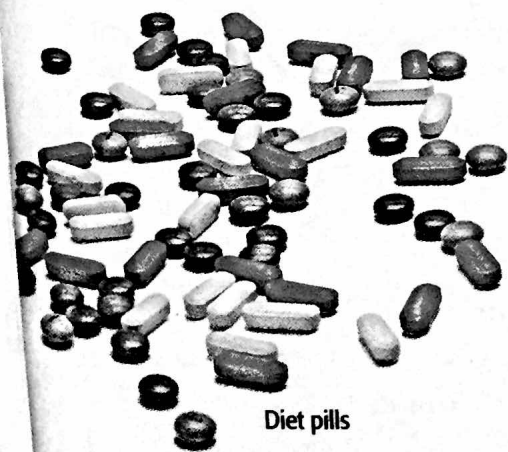


Weight control products

Fad Diets

Look up the term *diet* in the dictionary, and you will find it refers to everything you eat and drink. In this society in recent decades, however, the term *diet* has come to be associated with the idea of losing weight. Fad diets—approaches to weight control that are popular for a short time—come and go but rarely have any lasting effect. Many of these diets limit food variety and certain nutrients. They have names that tell all, such as the “grapefruit diet” or the “cabbage soup” diet. As a rule, these diets are hard to stick to for very long.

Some fad diets cost a lot of money. Others are far more costly, causing problems with one’s health. As a health consumer, you need to be aware of the health risks associated with such practices and products.



Diet pills

Let the Dieter Beware



Beware of any diet or product that:

- involves eating only one food.
- claims that you can eat anything you want or as much as you want.
- promises quick results.
- supplies too few calories—below 1,400 calories a day—for energy and health.
- requires a weight-loss aid, such as a vitamin pill, a body wrap, a liquid shake, or an appetite suppressant, or the purchase of books, videos, or tapes.
- promises spot reducing—an unrealistic claim because weight loss occurs all over.
- does not teach a person how to make lifestyle changes to achieve permanent weight loss.

▲ **There is no safe way to take weight off quickly, no matter what claims and promises the ads make.**

ACTIVITY List the key words on the product packages that are clues to false and misleading claims.

Weight Cycling

“Lose Pounds Fast!” At first, some diets seem to live up to claims like this. However, since the weight loss is usually from water, not body fat, the pounds lost are quickly regained. These rapid ups and downs in weight are all part of **weight cycling**. This is *the cycle of losing, regaining, losing, and regaining*. Other names are “seesaw dieting” and “yo-yo dieting.”

Weight cycling may be less healthy than being slightly overweight. Why? Lean body tissue lost along with body fat is replaced by more body fat. Because body fat burns fewer calories than muscle does, the person continues to require fewer and fewer calories to maintain weight. Therefore, losing weight becomes harder and harder.

Other Risky Weight-Loss Strategies

Other weight-loss approaches not only fail to achieve permanent weight loss, but they can be dangerous and even fatal. These include:

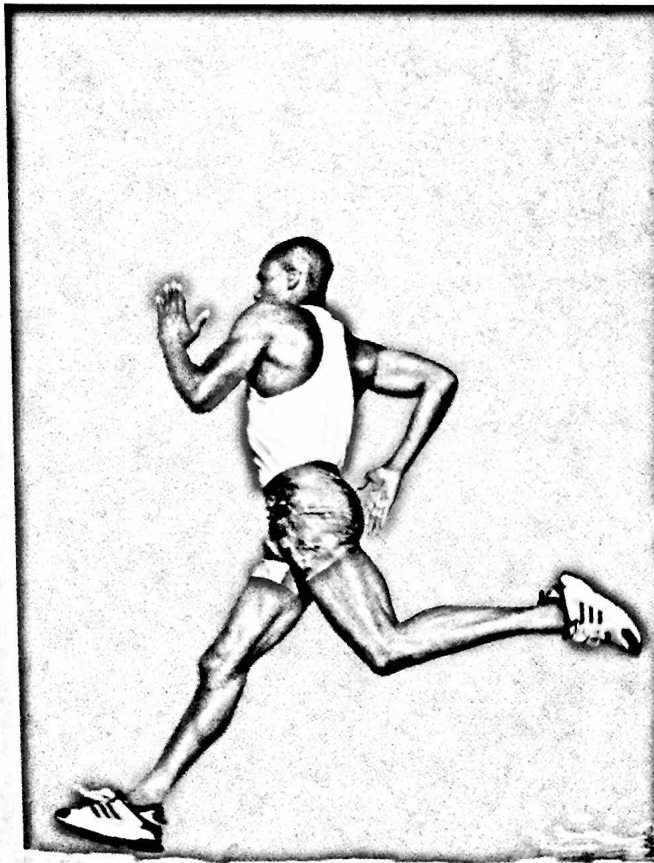
- **Fasting.** Avoiding food, or *fasting*, is dangerous even for a short time. For health, growth, and energy, you need a fresh supply of nutrients daily. For example, without enough food energy, the body uses its own muscle tissue for energy.
- **Liquid Protein Diets.** High-protein, low-carbohydrate liquid diets can have such serious side effects that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires a warning label on these products. Using them as the only source of nutrients can result in serious health problems, even death. Using them as an approach to weight loss should only be done under medical supervision.

- **Diet Pills.** Some diet pills claim to “burn,” “block,” or “flush” fat from the system. However, science has yet to come up with a low-risk pill that does this. Diet pills may help control the appetite, but they can have very serious side effects. Some cause drowsiness, while others may produce anxiety. Some diet pills may even be addictive.

Eating Disorders

Today's society is obsessed with being thin. The average female high-fashion model is about 5 feet 8 inches (1.7 m) tall and weighs less than 110 pounds (50 kg). Does this model represent an accurate picture of a healthy, typical female figure? In truth, no, but many people compare themselves to these models.

An obsession with thinness, along with psychological pressures and perhaps genetic factors, can lead to two eating disorders: anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Thousands of people in the United States, mainly females, suffer from these disorders.



▼ **Throughout history, each era has had its own standard for the ideal male and female form.**

ACTIVITY Describe the ideal body image represented by male and female models in advertisements today.



Helping a Friend with an Eating Disorder

If you have a friend who has an eating disorder, you can help by following these tips:

- First, listen.
- Use your active listening skills and encourage your friend to share feelings honestly.
- If you think the problem is serious, help your friend find adult or professional help.

➤ **People with eating disorders should seek professional medical help.**

ACTIVITY Explain the consequences a teen might face by not dealing with an eating disorder.

Anorexia Nervosa

Anorexia nervosa is a disorder in which the irrational fear of becoming obese results in severe weight loss from self-induced starvation. Anorexia means "without appetite." Nervosa means "of nervous origin." Anorexia nervosa is a psychological disorder with emotional and physical consequences. It relates directly to an individual's self-concept and coping abilities. Outside pressures, high expectations, the need to achieve, and the need to be accepted help lead to this disorder.

Each person with anorexia is different, but the following behaviors and emotions are typical: extremely low caloric intake, an obsession with exercising, emotional problems, unnatural interest in food, unrealistic or distorted sense of body image, and denial of an eating problem. Most people with anorexia are females in their teens or twenties. This disorder is not typically associated with males, but they can be at risk as well as females.

A person with anorexia has physical symptoms related to malnutrition and starvation. These include extreme weight loss, constipation, hormonal changes, heart damage, impaired immune function, and decreased heart rate. In females, the menstrual cycle may stop because of low body fat. In severe cases, anorexia can result in death.



Bulimia Nervosa

Bulimia nervosa is a disorder in which cycles of overeating are followed by some form of purging or clearing of the digestive tract. Often the person with bulimia follows a restrictive diet, then binges—or quickly eats large quantities of food—when hungry. This behavior is followed by self-induced vomiting or purging through abuse of laxatives. After a binge a person may try to follow a severely restrictive diet in order to restore a sense of control and avoid the possibility of weight gain.

The desire to become thin, more attractive, and more physically perfect can be overwhelming until vomiting or purging becomes a daily routine. Associated with this behavior may be the misguided notion that once the perfect figure is attained, everything in life will be fine. Bulimics are often secretive, but know they have a problem.

Bingeing, purging, or fasting should never be viewed as a smart way to control weight. Bulimia can lead to serious health problems—even death. Vomiting and diarrhea can lead to dehydration, kidney damage, and irregular heartbeat. Chronic vomiting erodes tooth enamel, causes tooth decay, and damages tissue of the stomach, esophagus, and mouth. Because laxative abuse interferes with digestion and absorption, nutrient deficiencies may occur. Laxative abuse can also lead to serious damage of blood composition.

Anorexia and bulimia are not diseases; they are symptoms of other problems. Both are psychological in nature. People suffering from these disorders need medical help and qualified counseling immediately. Recovery is a long process, but early diagnosis and care improve the chance of recovery.

If you believe a friend has symptoms of anorexia or bulimia, advise your school nurse, or, in a caring way, encourage your friend to get help. Do not try to counsel your friend yourself.