

# A History of Diets 1950-2018

The diet industry has urged restriction for decades. Now, however, more Americans believe what nutritionists have said all along: A varied, balanced diet is best.

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## 1950

### Cabbage Soup Diet

This plan claims to help followers lose 10 to 17 lb in 1 week, but that brevity makes it unrealistic for anyone looking to shed substantial weight and keep it off. Over the decades that follow, it's also called the Dolly Parton diet and the Trans World Airlines stewardess diet.

## 1963

### Weight Watchers

A 42-year-old housewife, Jean Nidetch, hosts Weight Watchers' first-ever public meeting in Queens, NY, which draws 400 people despite a lack of paid advertising. Nidetch had amassed a fast-growing following after she began inviting friends to her apartment to provide support while

they were trying to lose weight. Later, Weight Watchers develops a point system to make it easier for adherents to maintain balanced, healthy eating habits long-term.

## 1975

### Cookie Diet

Florida-based physician Sanford Siegal creates a diet promising both dessert and weight loss, with followers allowed six prepackaged protein cookies and one low-calorie meal per day. But its popularity eventually fades due to its lack of long-term sustainability.

## 1988

### Liquid Diet

Oprah Winfrey wheels a wagon full of animal fat onto the set of her show as a visual representation of the 67 lb she lost on

a fluids-only diet. A year later, she admits to gaining back 17 of the pounds, saying her weight fluctuated once she returned to solid food.

## 1990

### Diet Shakes

Slim-Fast Foods attracts 23 million customers after spending \$100 million on advertising. Sales of meal replacement drinks increase 28% this year, even as many experts begin to question the shakes' efficacy as a long-term diet solution.

## 1995

### Low-Fat Diet

In the wake of government recommendations to adopt a low-fat diet, food manufacturers release 1,300 low- and no-fat products by September. However, the strategy

backfires when the products, packed with sugar to make up for the absence of fat, lead to weight gain.

## 1999

### Zone Diet

Interest surges in the Zone diet, a highly structured plan based on decreasing hormone-induced inflammation. But its tedious meal preparation requirements (balancing every meal and snack with  $\frac{1}{3}$  protein,  $\frac{2}{3}$  carbs, and a "dash" of fat) make it difficult to follow, and research doesn't support its claims.

## 2000

### Blood Type Diet

*Eat Right 4 Your Type*, a book popularizing a diet customized for each blood type, written by naturopathic physician Peter D'Adamo, hits the *New York Times* best-seller list. In 2013, a review of blood-type diets finds a lack of medical evidence supporting his claims.

## 2003

### Atkins Diet

Piggybacking on the success of his 1972 book, *Dr. Atkins' Diet Revolution*, Robert C. Atkins publishes *Atkins for Life*, which tops

the *New York Times* hardcover advice best-seller list. By now, 30 million Americans have tried his very low-carb diet—even though it poses a risk of headaches and fatigue.

## 2004

### South Beach Diet

With about 7.8 million hardcover copies in print, *The South Beach Diet* becomes one of the country's fastest-selling diet books of all time. In years to follow, the plan is praised as a more moderate Atkins diet: Carbohydrates are reduced but not eliminated, and fats are eaten in moderation.

## 2013

### Clean-Eating Diet

The increasingly restrictive clean-eating movement gains steam, with more books featuring advice and recipes promoting the elimination of food groups such as wheat, meat, soy, dairy, eggs, and shellfish. Today, dietitians warn that too many restrictions can cause an unhealthy obsession with food.

## 2016

### Paleo Diet

GrubHub, a food takeout and delivery company,

reveals that orders for Paleo foods increased 370% since 2015. But experts warn that the Paleo diet, which eliminates dairy, legumes, and grains to mimic what our hunter-gatherer ancestors ate, is misguided. Not only can those foods benefit your health, but copying our ancestors' diet is impossible because many foods are biologically different today.

## 2017

### Ketogenic Diet

Google searches spike for this extremely high-fat, low-carbohydrate diet. A year later, however, an expert panel deems it unhealthy due to its high levels of saturated fat and restrictive nature.

## 2018

Eating plans promoting balance—the Mediterranean diet, the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet, and the flexitarian diet (a vegetarian plan that allows some meat)—take the top three spots on the *U.S. News & World Report* Best Diets list. Atkins, Paleo, and ketogenic are ranked as three of the worst diets evaluated.