



# Pick Your Path to Health

## Healthy Dieting

Government surveys consistently reveal that most adults are trying to lose weight, and that the prevalence of overweight and obese adults has increased steadily over the past 30 years. So if you are looking for a reality check on dieting, you are looking at the right time.

### Research Findings

A U.S. Department of Agriculture report released in January finds that appearance and physical comfort, rather than change in medical condition or weight, are the most important factors when adults set their weight loss goals.

"Overweight individuals are willing to try just about any new diet that promises quick, dramatic results more in line with their desired goals and expectations than with what good science supports," the report states.

According to the report, more research is needed to determine if popular diets are scientifically sound and whether they are effective for weight loss and weight maintenance. In addition, the report finds that:

- Many popular diets result in weight loss but not in weight maintenance.
- Low-calorie diets cause a greater loss of body water than body fat. When these diets end, water weight is regained.
- High-fat, low-carbohydrate diets are nutritionally inadequate and are high in saturated fat and cholesterol.
- When individuals consume foods from all food groups, it is more likely that their diet will be nutritionally adequate.

### A Healthy Approach

If you have tried every diet out there and are still overweight, you may want to take a realistic and unbiased look at the types of diets you are using. When it comes to diet fads, most likely what these promise is too good to be true. Follow your instincts and implement serious moderation in how you consume food and be choosy about the food you consume.

"Our office stresses taking simple action steps. We don't ask people to diet because dieting is unrealistic for many people," says Dee Baldwin, Executive Director of Georgia's Office of Women's Health.

"I tell women not to punish themselves with diets," emphasizes Baldwin. She recommends that women:

- Cut back on the size of the portions they eat.
- Cut back on fats.
- Read food labels for fat intake.
- Avoid fried foods.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Focus on the positive.
- Walk 10-15 minutes each day to improve overall health.

### **Refocus Your Efforts**

Is it time to refocus on healthy dieting? Begin by writing down what you eat for at least 2 weeks. Look for patterns that may sabotage your efforts and begin eliminating them slowly. Healthy eating and dieting are not found in a hunger suppressant pill or the latest diet, so plan your efforts and goals for the long term.

Next, find as much information as you can about the nutrition women your age need. Women's bodies change dramatically over the course of a lifetime, and nutritional needs change as well. Understanding popular diets and nutrition may be your best weapon in your quest for health at every stage of life.

Implement changes slowly and at your own pace. Following the accelerated schedule of some diets may not suit your nutritional needs and eating habits. And, as the USDA report recommends, consume foods from all food groups but always in moderation

You may want to get started by visiting a new Web site launched by the USDA that provides resources and information on nutrition, healthy eating, and physical activity. Visit the Web site at [www.nutrition.gov](http://www.nutrition.gov). Also check out nutrition and recipe tips for African-American women at [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov) (click on the For Your Heart banner)

"Being conscious of one's behaviors, using social support, confronting problems directly, and using personally developed strategies may enhance long-term success," states the USDA's report.

A realistic assessment of popular diets and of your own nutritional needs will lead you down a path to better health.

*Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. For other tips on improving your health, or for more information on the Pick Your Path to Health campaign, call 1-800-994-WOMAN or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at [www.4woman.gov](http://www.4woman.gov).*