

The Truth About Quick Fixes and Weight Loss Myths

With the hassle of everyday work and life, it is easy to neglect our diet and physical activity. According to the National Health and Morbidity Survey 2019, the prevalence of obesity in Malaysia increased from 15.1% in 2011 to 19.7% in 2019 and 1 in every 2 adults is obese.

With more people looking for that ideal diet online, there is a risk that they may come across and believe unfounded statements about dieting, which could have serious implications on health. Dietitians are here to bust those myths and set us on the right path in proper body weight management.

Myth #1 All carbohydrates should be avoided during weight loss period as they are fattening

There is a common misconception that carbohydrates need to be eliminated in order to lose weight. The truth is, carbohydrates are the body's main source of energy. One gram of carbohydrates or protein provides 4 kcal whereas one gram of fat provides 9 kcal. Prolonged avoidance of carbohydrates will force our body to use fat as source of energy and resulting ketosis. Ketosis is not safe for anyone with existing health conditions.

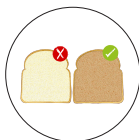
However, this also leads to a decrease in muscle mass in the long term because the body converts our muscle proteins into energy.

The Malaysian Dietary Guidelines 2010 recommends that at least half of all the grains we eat are of whole grains. Dietary fibre from the bran of whole grains (Refer to Figure 1) can provide a feeling of fullness and better portion control. It is recommended to control the portion of carbohydrates based on Malaysian Healthy Plate concept. (refer to Figure 2)

Here are some easy ways to incorporate whole grains into your diet:



Mix white rice with brown rice



Choose whole meal bread instead of white bread



Add uncooked oats or brown rice into your homemade soup or desserts

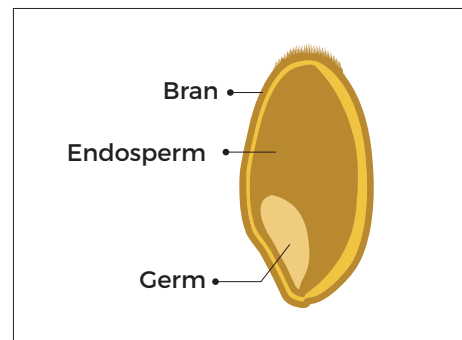


Figure 1: Cross section of whole grains

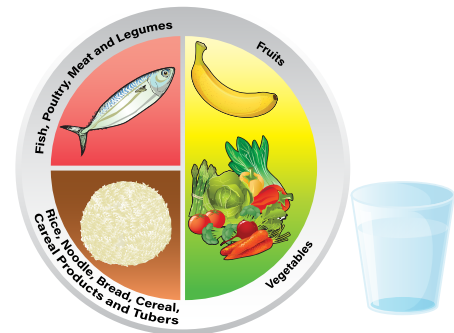


Figure 2: Malaysian Healthy Plate

Myth #2 I should skip my meals if I want to lose weight

Skipping meals can trick your body into starvation mode and reduces your metabolism rate. Being hungry also interrupts your ability to think rationally and may lead to overeating at later meals. It is advisable to have regular meals in moderation. Try to have smaller but frequent meals throughout the day. For example, 3 main meals with 1 to 2 light snacks in between. Choose lower calorie snacks such as low-fat yoghurt, fruits, low-fat milk with oats. Refer to Figure 3 for a calorie comparison between two snacks:

Mindful eating is another technique that can help control our eating behaviour. Chew slowly and focus during eating as it takes 20 minutes for us to feel full. Listening to your physical hunger cues can also help you to reduce emotional eating.

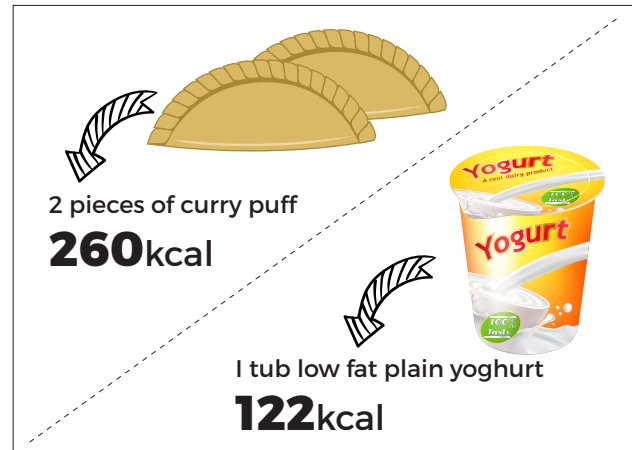


Figure 3: Calorie comparison between two snacks

Myth #3 Fad diets will help me lose weight effectively

Fad diets often promise rapid weight loss with minimum effort as they are restrictive with few foods or unusual food combination. You can usually spot them on from social media advertising which promise rapid weight loss of more than 5kg per week, promotes eating single food only and even recommends eating non-food item such as cotton wool. Examples of fad diets are listed in the table below:

Types of Fad Diets	Key components
Ketogenic Diet	- Promotes diet high fat, moderate protein and very low in carbohydrate. Typically 70% fat, 20% protein, 10% carbohydrate - Encourage body to use ketone as main source of energy
New Atkins Diet Revolution 2002	- Encourages restriction of carbohydrates until maintenance phase is reached - Focuses on lean protein and healthy fat
Single food diet	Promotes eating a single food item such as cabbage soup or apple only
Paleo Diet	- Promotes diet rich with lean meats, fish, fruits, non-starchy vegetables, nuts and seeds - Omits grains, starchy vegetables, dairy products and processed food

During the initial stage, weight loss is due to the reduction of muscle mass and therefore, basal metabolism rate is also significantly reduced. However, most people are unable to sustain the weight loss for long term after they revert to their normal diet pattern. Consequently, it causes their weight to rebound and this is known as the 'Yo-Yo' Effect. Besides, extreme food restrictions also increase the risks of nutritional deficiency.

Weight management requires lifestyle changes including dietary modification and regular exercise. Consult a Dietitian for an individualised weight management plan tailored to your lifestyle and food preferences.