Defining a Fad Diet
According to the Oxford Language Dictionary, a fad is defined as “an intense and widely shared enthusiasm for something, especially one that is short-lived and without basis in the object's qualities.” Diet can mean “to live one’s life” (Greek) or be “a manner of living” (Latin). Oftentimes, a fad diet is a method of eating to lose weight that becomes popular for a short time without being a standard dietary recommendation.

Detecting Fad Diets
- Dictates how much, how often, what and when to eat
- Excludes certain foods or food groups
- Promises magic or miracle foods that burn fat
- Costs money and takes a lot of time
- Don’t have freedom to make your own decisions
- Food may become boring if options are limited
- Identifies foods as “good” or “bad,” “healthy” or “unhealthy”
- Contradicts recommendations of evidence-based research or reputable health organizations
- Advertises benefits of specific food combinations or one type of food
- Have to buy prepackaged foods and supplements
- Promises rapid weight loss (>2 pounds per week)
- Requires no physical activity
- Sounds too good to be true

Effectiveness of Fad Diets
While each fad diet differs based on what is and is not “allowed,” one shared feature is that many fad diets are temporary which means the results are too. Sustainability is key to lifelong, lasting health benefits, and without them many dieters are left feeling like failures when in reality the diet is what failed.

Here’s what multiple, longitudinal studies have discovered about diets and dieting:
- One-third to two-thirds of weight is regained within one year [after weight loss], and almost all weight is regained within five years.¹
- One-third to two-thirds of dieters regain more weight than was lost on their diets.²

Consider the following when evaluating a diet or health goal:
- Is it healthy for loved ones to follow?
- Is it temporary or sustainable? Anything that’s temporary (goal, diet, behavior) and the result is too so consider what is reasonable and sustainable in the short– and long– term.
- Does it take into consideration your personal interests, lifestyle, values and needs?
- Is it important to you (intrinsically motivated) versus others (e.g., parents, partners, peers, etc.)?
- How does it impact your overall health and wellbeing—mentally, emotionally, physically, socially, financially, etc.?
- What is the ultimate goal and will you be sacrificing anything to attain that goal?
- Are there other healthy, more sustainable ways to reach your goal?
- How might dieting affect your relationship with food, with others, and your lifestyle?

Starting a fad diet might seem alluring, especially when quick results are promised. However, many health goals can be achieved through less drastic and restrictive measures, and safer and sustainable means.

For more information, visit the Student Life Student Wellness Center’s Nutrition Resources page or to meet with a Nutrition Coach visit the Schedule an Appointment page.

References