

Diet fads fizzle with time

Your teen flips through her favorite magazine and finds an interesting article about her favorite celebrity. The celebrity shares some of her style secrets, including how she stays so thin: Turns out, she eats only raw food ... nothing cooked, steamed, processed or boiled. Next thing you know, your daughter is asking for sushi every night, sans rice.

The example may sound extreme, but fad diets come and go almost as quickly as the latest fashion trends, and 'tweens and teens are not immune to the promise of fast results with drastic diet changes. There's no shortage of diet options, either. Some of the more popular choices include low-carb or high-protein and cleansing diets, in which participants are encouraged to "flush" their systems clean by drinking large quantities of one liquid or another.

Dietitians at the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital warn these diets are most often ineffective and sometimes dangerous, especially for children and young adults.

"One of the biggest problems with these types of diets is that they don't work for the long haul," said Lori Mooney, a registered dietitian at Nationwide Children's who counsels children on healthy eating habits. "Anyone can lose weight for the short term, but keeping it off is the key."

Most fad diets, Mooney said, are short-term solutions. Once dieters go back to their normal eating habits, they have a difficult time keeping off the weight. And if dieters continue to eliminate entire food groups for long periods of time, they may put themselves at risk for problems such as kidney damage, dehydration and high cholesterol. The risk is heightened for adolescents who are still growing and developing and require a wide variety of vitamins, nutrients and minerals.

"Cutting out an entire group of foods, such as carbohydrates, proteins or dairy, isn't a good idea for any of us, but it's particularly harmful for young people," Mooney said. "Adolescence is a critical time for both physical and mental development, and each food group plays a critical role in supporting this process."

Mooney recommended against dieting in general and said even point-based systems, which can be effective, don't take into account the overall health and well-being of the individual. For example, as long as the dieter sticks to his allotted number of "points" each day, he is free to eat nothing but pizza



Eat a rainbow of foods.

Weight-loss tips

- Stock your shelves with healthy choices.
- Eat a rainbow of foods.
- Control portion sizes.
- Modify favorite recipes, substituting high-fat and sugar ingredients for better choices.
- Don't grocery shop when you're hungry.
- Partner with someone you can count on and encourage each other.
- Avoid buffet-style restaurants.
- Request half or lunch portions.
- Pack your lunch versus buying.
- Decrease high-fat condiments.
- Share a plate or dessert.
- Understand labels and marketing.
- Increase activity.
- Avoid sugary beverages.

and soda pop — although he isn't able to eat much food at all that way.

Instead, Mooney recommended following your mother's timeless advice: Eat your fruits and vegetables. Limit your sweets and high-fat, high-sugar foods. Exercise. Watch your portion sizes. Enjoy a rainbow of foods, and keep everything in moderation. Don't skip breakfast, and don't starve yourself.

It's not sexy. It's not new. But it is life-altering and does work. It's a lifestyle, not a diet. It's a way of living that will follow adolescents into adulthood and will lead to a healthy, balanced diet.

Experts from the Center for Healthy Weight and Nutrition at Nationwide Children's Hospital provided the information for this column.