



TODAY'S DIET TRENDS:
Understanding consumers
and weight loss

In an increasingly overweight society where an estimated 160 million people globally are overweight or obese,¹ losing or maintaining weight is a frequent concern for Americans.²

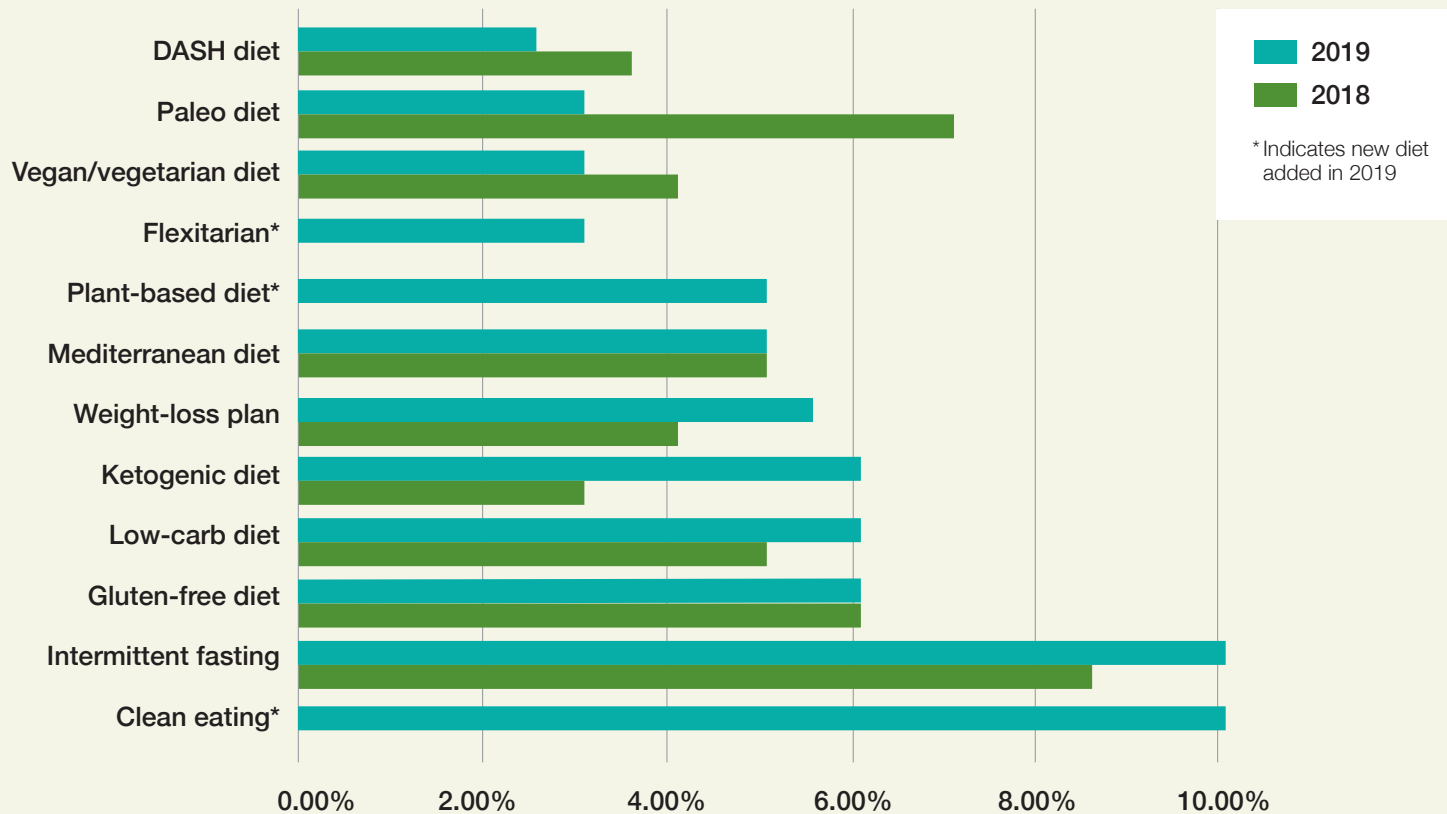
Not surprisingly, the concept of weight loss as a health benefit is top-of-mind for many people. Dietary regimens are always of interest and a major driver of food trends.

But the popularity of specific diets tends to rise and fall as much as a typical roller coaster based on word of mouth, celebrity endorsements and media coverage that often simplifies their impact on overall health. While some diets come and go in a flash and others have demonstrated health benefits and staying power, what is increasingly clear is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to diet and weight management.

So what is the current thinking about weight management and diet? It's a good question. There are diets for overall health and wellness, diets geared for specific health issues such as heart health, diets for weight maintenance and now even various forms of a "no diet" diet.

Nonetheless, that isn't stopping the consumer quest for the perfect individual diet plan. According to data from the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation's Food and Health Survey, weight loss/management is now the most desired health benefit from food, and about 38% follow a specific diet, with clean eating now cited as the most widely followed pattern.³

TYPE OF DIET FOLLOWED



Source: IFIC 2019 Food and Health Survey

According to the IFIC data on the types of diets followed, trendy regimens are seeing mixed usage – Keto is on the rise, while the Paleo diet declined in usage and more general healthful eating patterns like clean eating (which wasn't tracked prior to this year) have come on strong.

With that said, many consumers remain confused about connecting specific foods to health and weight-loss goals, according to IFIC data.⁴ And little wonder, as some diet regimens tout buzz-worthy benefits but have unrealistic demands, some are notoriously difficult to follow, while others have little scientific substantiation.

To help consumers sift through the diet regimen clutter, *U.S. News and World Report* annually ranks the best overall diets, as well as those designed to meet specific goals or health criteria. Interestingly, those that are consistently ranked highest overall are the Mediterranean Diet, the DASH Eating Plan (Dietary Approach for Stopping Hypertension) and the Flexitarian Diet.⁵

This would seem to indicate that, on the whole, there is no silver bullet... and diets that emphasize a balance of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean meats (similar to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Dietary Guidelines for Americans, or DGAs) are the most effective and practical. Nevertheless, every year trendy new diets surface and some may turn the food industry upside-down. As a result, it's important to stay on top of emerging diets and nutrition fads.

Here is an overview of what is on-trend:

The Staying Power of Whole Food Diets

With so many diets out there, it is hard to know which ones are the real deal and which are more of a whim. Perhaps it is better to consider the dietary guidance from the DGAs,⁶ which provides the foundations of a nutritious diet. The top-ranked overall trending diets are well-known, well-studied and boast good success for those who practice them. They also tend to tout a balanced, whole-food approach and many have cultural constancy. The first two regimens – the Mediterranean and DASH diets – are both mentioned in the DGAs, so they are really more than just trends and have substantial supporting evidence.

Take the Mediterranean diet, for example. It has thousands of years of historical use and is now considered one of the most sustainable dietary approaches to health and longevity, according to the *U.S. News* report. It is also extensively studied and is most well-known for its support of healthy cardiovascular function.^{7,8} According to the U.S. DGAs, the Healthy Mediterranean-Style pattern recommends modifying intake from some food groups that have been associated with positive outcomes in studies of Mediterranean-Style diets. The healthfulness of this eating style was evaluated based on its similarity to food group intakes reported for groups with positive health outcomes in these studies, rather than from specific nutrient standards.⁹ The USDA notes the diet includes consumption of more fruits and seafood and less dairy than the Healthy U.S. Style Eating Pattern, although it has not been evaluated for nutrient adequacy standards (it does tend to be lower in calcium and vitamin D due to less dairy consumption). Its potential for support of health is substantiated. According to an analysis of the diet from the Harvard School of Public Health, widespread practice of a traditional Mediterranean diet could eliminate more than 80% of coronary heart disease and 70% of stroke.¹⁰



Similarly, regimens like the DASH and Flexitarian diets are also good choices for people who are looking to be health-conscious, and in general, manage their weight and maintain healthy blood pressure or cholesterol levels.^{11,12} The DASH Diet, according to the U.S. DGAs, was designed to increase intake of foods expected to lower blood pressure while being heart-healthy and also meeting Institute of Medicine (IOM) nutrient recommendations. It was adapted from DASH research trials and is available at specific calorie levels. The trials found that the DASH dietary pattern lowered blood pressure and LDL-cholesterol levels, which resulted in reduced risk of cardiovascular disease. The DASH plan is typically low in saturated fats and rich in potassium, calcium and magnesium, as well as fiber and protein. It recommends lower sodium intake, meets Dietary Reference Intakes for all essential nutrients and stays within the limits for overconsumed nutrients, while allowing for some adaptability in food choices based on preference, cost and ability.¹³

Newer on this scene is the Nordic Diet, which has ten core concepts including eating more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, seafood and high-quality meat (but less meat overall). This diet also espouses using organically grown produce, eating seasonally and foods from wild landscapes, while avoiding processed foods with additives.¹⁴

The Non-Diet Diet – Eating for Health and Values

What might be most interesting about current diet trends is that as Americans learn more about specific foods and how they impact health, they are trying to take a more mindful approach. Eating to support gut health is a case-in-point. As the science about microbiome balance grows, consumers are beginning to understand the benefits of adding fermented foods with probiotics and high-fiber foods with prebiotics to achieve gut equilibrium. Similarly, consumers now understand the health, ethical and environmental issues around what they eat and are shifting to more plant-based foods as a result.

According to the IFIC study, this trend transcends specific diet plans, with people now noting they follow diets higher in vegetables such as plant-based, vegan/vegetarian and flexitarian diets. In the survey, three quarters of respondents said they are familiar with plant-based diets and half are interested in learning more.

Both of these trends are having a big impact on the food industry. Digestive health is now the third most sought-after health benefit from food, behind only weight loss/management and energy,¹⁵ and the plant-based food category saw significant growth – with continued growth expected.¹⁶

What all top-ranked regimens have in common is that they tend to recommend less emphasis on dieting itself and a more traditional eating style that is seasonal and local, with a relaxed approach to food, emphasizing that meals are important time spent with family and friends.

Some nutrition experts are even hoping to see the pendulum move away from dieting altogether – toward a more mindful style of eating and following evidence-based nutrition recommendations, noting that more than 80 percent of diets fail over the long-term and can also be harmful, leading to weight cycling and eating disorders.¹⁷

Perhaps the point is to feel good about food and sustenance and the enjoyment it provides, rather than targeting weight loss. Taking a more intuitive approach that supports overall health may turn out to be the best of both worlds.

References

- ¹ Ng, M; Flemming, T; et al. "Global, Regional, and National Prevalence of Overweight and Obesity in Children and Adults During 1980–2013: A Systematic Analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013." *The Lancet*. Aug. 30, 2014. 384(9945):766-781.
- ² International Food Information Council Foundation. 2019 Food & Health Survey. <https://foodinsight.org/interest-in-sustainability-plant-based-diets-among-trends-in-ific-foundation-2019-food-and-health-survey/>
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ International Food Information Council Foundation. 2018 Food & Health Survey. <https://foodinsight.org/2018-food-and-health-survey/>
- ⁵ U.S. News Reveals the Best Diets Ranking for 2019. *U.S. News and World Report*. January 2, 2019. <https://www.usnews.com/info/blogs/press-room/articles/2019-01-02/us-news-reveals-best-diets-rankings-for-2019>
- ⁶ United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020. Dietary Guidelines and MyPlate. <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/dietary-guidelines>
- ⁷ Murphy, KJ; Parletta, N. Implementing a Mediterranean-Style Diet Outside of the Mediterranean Region. *Current Atherosclerosis Reports*. May 4, 2018; 20(6): 28.
- ⁸ Rees, K; Takeda, A; et al. Mediterranean-Style Diet for the Primary and Secondary Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease. *Cochrane Database Systematic Review*. March 13, 2019; 3. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30864165>
- ⁹ USDA Dietary Guidelines. Dietary Guidelines 2015-2020. Appendix 4: Food Patterns: Healthy Mediterranean-Style Eating Patterns. <https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/appendix-4/>
- ¹⁰ Willett, WC. The Mediterranean Diet: Science and Practice. *Public Health Nutrition*. February 2006; 9(1A):105-110. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16512956>
- ¹¹ Moktari, Z; Sharafkhan, M; et al. Adherence to the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH) Diet and Risk of Total and Cause-Specific Mortality: Results from Golestan Cohort Study. *International Journal of Epidemiology*. May 5, 2019. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/31056682>
- ¹² Derbyshire, EJ. Flexitarian Diets and Health: A Review of the Evidence-Based Literature. *Frontiers in Nutrition*. Jan 6, 2017; 3:55. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28111625>
- ¹³ USDA Dietary Guidelines. Chapter 1: Elements of Healthy Eating Patterns. Callout on DASH Diet. <https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/chapter-1/a-closer-look-inside-healthy-eating-patterns/#callout-dash>
- ¹⁴ Ibid. U.S. News and World Report.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. IFIC 2019.
- ¹⁶ Plant-Based Food Association data/Nielsen. U.S. 2018 Retail Sales Data for Plant Based Foods. <https://plantbasedfoods.org/consumer-access/nielsen-data-release-2018/>
- ¹⁷ From Gut Health to Hemp: Seven Diet Trends will Dominate 2019. <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/diet-trends-to-know-for-2019>

Claims: The labeling, substantiation and decision making of all claims for your products is your responsibility. We recommend you consult regulatory and legal advisors familiar with all applicable laws, rules and regulations prior to making labeling and claims decisions.