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3 to diet for

America is overwhelmed with diets. Flip through the morning shows and there are weight-loss gurus on every channel pumping their products and plans. Go into the health section of the bookstore, and you'll find aisles of books promising the secret to shedding pounds.

We've broken down a couple of the latest weight-loss plans.

The Portion Teller diet

Created by: Lisa Young, a New York dietician who appeared in the movie "Supersize Me."

Philosophy: Big portions make us fat. By limiting portions of certain foods, we can manage our weight. Also, understanding why we eat too much is key to controlling our diets.

How it works: Sensible eating choices without needing to weigh food or count calories. Young says her book educates people so they will make smarter choices about how much they're eating. For example, when they learn that eating one muffin is like eating six and a half waffles, they may choose to eat fewer muffins. Behavior strategies (such as not eating out of bags) are supposed to help people improve their diets.

What you can eat: Anything, but in reasonable portions.

What you can't: No foods are prohibited, but Young discourages eating red meat, cream or foods made with trans fats.

Buzz words: Portion Awareness, which means knowing how much protein, carbohydrates, fruits, vegetables and fat you should be eating. Also, Young has categories for different kinds of overeaters: Mindless Muncher, Volume Eater and Lopsided Eater.

Dietitians weigh in: Manipulating portions so that you're eating fewer calories is one of the only true ways to lose weight, said Dawn Jackson Blatner.

The 3-Hour Diet

Created by: Diet expert Jorge Cruise, who's been on TV's "Extra" and writes a column for USA Weekend

Philosophy: When you eat is more important than what you eat. Waiting more than three hours between eating causes the body to consume lean muscle tissue, which controls your metabolism.

How it works: Eat your first meal within an hour of waking up, then every three hours, including a snack between each meal. Stop eating at least three hours before bedtime.

What you can eat: Portion control at meals is emphasized. For breakfast, lunch and dinner, Cruise suggests a plate with protein the size of a deck of cards, a Rubik's cube size of carbs, a water cap of fat and three DVD cases of vegetables and fruit. The 3-Hour Diet also has its own line of meal replacement bars or smaller snack bars for between meals.

What you can't eat: Too much of anything. There are no bad foods, only bad portions.

Buzz words: "Time Based Nutrition." Also, cortisol, a stress-related chemical that Cruise says causes belly fat. Eating every three hours is supposed to reduce cortisol levels in the body, which will cause dieters to lose their abdominal fat first.

Dietitians weigh in: Portion control is good, but pinning a diet on cortisol levels is "oversimplifying a complicated biochemical situation in the body," Cynthia Sass said. Because cortisol is related to stress, you can still have high levels if you're eating right but experiencing a lot of stress.

Bread for Life Diet

Created by: Olga Raz, an Israeli nutritionist.

Philosophy: Low-carb diets don't work because they cause low levels of serotonin, a chemical in the blood. Carbs boost serotonin levels, making you feel full and satisfied.

How it works: Eat bread. Lots of it. The diet suggests eight to 12 slices of bread a day for women and 12 to 16 slices a day for men. Raz recommends light bread made with whole grains, but you can occasionally have white bread. If you eat regular bread, she recommends cutting in half the number of slices each day.

What you can eat: Carbs, including rice and pasta about two weeks into the diet; as many vegetables as you want; poultry, lean meat, fish and eggs three to five times a week; some fruit.

What you can't eat: No food is banned, but you should limit red meat, white bread and fruit. There is no calorie counting, but you are supposed to watch the amount of simple carbohydrates (sugars) and fat you eat.

Buzz words: Serotonin, a chemical that signals to your body that you are full. Carbs raise your serotonin levels, while low-carb diets make them drop, Raz said. High serotonin levels improve your mood and get rid of cravings.

Dietitians weigh in: This diet sounds like too many carbs for some of Cynthia Sass' clients, such as shorter women with a sedentary lifestyle. They might not be able to burn the carbs they're eating, which could cause them to gain more weight, she said.

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Weight till you hear this . . .

Americans don't use common sense when looking for easy diet

Is cutting carbonation the new low-carb?

Or is the road to thin paved by exercise, raw foods, saltless snacks or Subway sandwiches? There are so many competing claims in tabloids, on TV and in diet books promising the secrets to being skinny that it's tempting to believe there's a quick fix that will save us from fatness.

Hilary Duff claims that saying bye-bye to bubbly soft drinks helped her shed pounds. Kirstie Alley signed on with Jenny Craig to lose her "Fat Actress" image.

Celebrities, like many Americans, have tried fad diet after fad diet--including the low-carb frenzy that recently went bust with Atkins bankruptcy--but we don't seem to be much smarter or skinnier for it.

We're still looking for the next easy way.

About a quarter of American adults say they're on a diet at any given time, said Harry Balzer, vice president of the NPD Group, a market research organization. Most dieters are looking for a quick fix because they want to lose weight without work. So far, they haven't found it.

"That's why we're always running from diet to diet," Balzer said. "It's too hard to do it the right way."

The right way, no surprise, is to eat right, consume fewer calories and exercise more. It seems like common sense, but dietitians say it's a message their clients don't always get or don't want to hear.

"It's just not sexy and does not sell books," said Dawn Jackson Blatner, a dietitian who works at Northwestern Memorial's Wellness Institute and a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association. Many dieters would rather believe in magic--or myths--than work at losing weight, experts say.

Dietitian Cynthia Sass hears plenty of diet myths from the overweight people she works with in Florida.

She has clients who think they're "safe" because they're eating at Subway, where spokesman Jared lost all that weight. But they're eating their whole day's limit of carbs in one 12-inch sub and bag of baked chips, Sass said.

"Still today, people think if the food is healthy, they don't have to worry about the portion size," she said.

Cutting carbonation isn't a magic fix, either. Carbonation causes bloating, so if you stop drinking carbonated beverages, you may feel less bloated and your pants may feel a little looser. But that doesn't mean you shed any fat.

"Really, you're just not bloated anymore," Sass said.

Reducing salt helps you lose water weight, because sodium causes water retention, but it doesn't have anything to do with losing body fat, Sass said.

For those of us who still don't want to follow doctors' proven recipes for weight loss, there are new diets that could become tomorrow's fads.

Love bread? You can eat 12 to 16 slices a day with the new "Bread for Life" diet, which promises to help you shed pounds, cut your cravings and make you happier than you were eating bunless burgers and low-carb pasta, thanks to elevated levels of serotonin that boost your mood.

"It takes suffering out of dieting," said Olga Raz, the Israeli nutritionist who developed the bread diet. She says people are so content that they can maintain the diet for life.

Another option for people who like to eat often is the "The 3-Hour Diet," which says you can lose two pounds every week if you never go more than three hours without eating (while you're awake, of course). It promises dieters will shed their belly fat first.

And if you're tired of eating like a French woman, how about trying the Japanese way?

Japanese homestyle cooking keeps women healthy, slim and youthful, according to promotional material for "Japanese Women Don't Get Old or Fat: Secrets of My Mother's Tokyo Kitchen" by Naomi Moriyama. An example of healthy Japanese eating: using brown rice instead of white.

Hot on the heels of the popular "French Women Don't Get Fat: The Secret of Eating for Pleasure," Moriyama's book, due out next month, continues the trend of cultural eating.

American women who eat on the run and buy prepared and processed meals will likely get another dose of advice from Moriyama about using natural foods and taking time to sit down and enjoy a meal.

Another book, released earlier this year, says portion control is the key to a thinner you. Skip the supersized, think smaller-is-better, and eat the foods you want while still losing weight, according to dietitian **Lisa Young's "The Portion Teller."**

"It's really a non-dieting approach," said Young, who appeared in the documentary "Supersize Me." "It's more of a lifestyle."

Balzer, the food market researcher, says he's starting to hear buzz about smaller portions of packaged foods, such as 100-calorie Oreo packs. Coca-Cola is also starting to sell 100-calorie Cokes.

Dietitians say that as much as we might want it, there's still no magic trick to shedding weight, especially if a particular diet doesn't fit a person's lifestyle.

Instead, they recommend taking sensible pieces from each--portion control, not eating while standing or working, and eating whole grains--to develop an individual plan.

"One diet does not fit all," Blatner said. "What works for your hairdresser might not work for you, and what works for your girlfriend might now work for you."

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Mini-size it

If food industry marketers are astute judges of diet trends, then the hottest fad seems to be portion control.

And if you can't resist supersizing, food marketers are going to help by providing smaller servings.

"This is just the latest incarnation of the trend of Americans trying to lose weight by eating," said Harry Balzer, a researcher at NPD Group who studies eating habits. In addition to smaller portions of snacks already on store shelves, he expects to see cereal, ice cream, juice and many other products packaged in small servings.

Here are some snacks now or soon to be available in 100-calorie

versions:

Cheese Nips

Wheat Thins

Oreo

Cookies

Pringles

Coke