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## FAD OR FACT?

It can be hard to distinguish fact from fiction, with diets being touted as the ‘next quick fix’ in the media. While some trends don’t last, others are becoming mainstream. But what does the research say, asks dietitian **Rebecca Williams**.

**G**luten-free, low-carb, Paleo, the Mediterranean Diet—the list goes on! There does not seem to be a week that goes by without another new ‘diet’ emerging. But is there any science or ‘truth’ behind these so-called miracle diets?.

### IS GOING GLUTEN-FREE REALLY A HEALTHIER OPTION?

Many believe it’s healthier to avoid gluten, with nearly 1 in 5 Aussies buying gluten free foods. This isn’t surprising when gluten free foods fill the ‘health food aisle’ and are sold as a ‘healthy’ alternative in cafes.

But compared to gluten-containing foods, gluten-free foods often fall short nutritionally. Many choices are low in key vitamins and minerals such as folate, iron, zinc and magnesium, and they’re often higher in calories and saturated fat too. Gluten-free options usually have a higher glycaemic index and are lower in protein and whole grains, making them less filling.

Long-term restrictive diets which exclude gluten have negative health effects too. A large Harvard study published this year showed diets low in gluten may be associated with a higher risk of type 2 diabetes. This is likely due to restriction of core grain foods, particularly those rich in cereal fibre and whole grain, such as whole grain breakfast cereal, wholemeal bread and pasta, which have been shown to promote health and reduce chronic disease risk.

Anyone with coeliac disease or suspected gluten intolerance should work with an accredited practising dietitian to ensure their diet is balanced.

### WHAT ABOUT A LOW-CARB DIET?

With an abundance of carb-phobic messages in the media, many Australians looking to lose weight

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may cut out carbohydrate containing foods. While this eliminates nutrient-poor foods like cake, pies and pizza, it also eliminates quality foods, like whole grain or high fibre grain foods, legumes and starchy vegetables like potato and pumpkin, which provide key nutrients for health.

A restrictive low carbohydrate diet is no better than a more sustainable higher carbohydrate diet when it comes to long-term weight loss. A recent Australian study showed adults who ate the most core grain foods (≥6 serves per day) were no more likely to be overweight than those who limited or avoided core grain foods. In fact, whole grain and high fibre grain foods have been linked to a healthier weight and a reduced risk of being overweight.

### CAN I REALLY EAT MY WAY TO A HEALTHY GUT?

Gut health is certainly on trend. The composition and diversity of our gut bacteria is unique to each of us and shaped by a number of factors, including our food.

Fibre plays a big role in gut health. Prebiotics, a type of dietary fibre, promote growth of beneficial gut bacteria and stimulate the production of short-chain fatty acids, thought to promote health and reduce chronic disease risk. Include a range of high fibre, plant-based foods in your diet including fruit, vegetables, high fibre grain foods, legumes, nuts and seeds to maximise gut health.

### SO WHAT’S THE BOTTOM LINE?

Fad diets come and go, but the true recipe for good health is about getting back to basics. Whole foods (fruit and vegetables, grain foods, dairy and alternatives, meat, seafood, nuts, seeds and legumes) offer a unique set of nutrients that promote good health and protect against disease. So save your time and money by avoiding fad diets! **PS**

For more nutrition inspiration, contact an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD). APDs translate the latest in nutrition science into practical, tailored advice, and can help motivate and support you towards better health. To find an APD visit: [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)