RESOLVED TO GET HEALTHY IN 2019? READ THIS FIRST

December 10, 2018 | By *Momentum*

The end of the year means the start of wrap reports and trend predictions. Among the most debated lists: the U.S. News & World Report's top 40 diet rankings. So as we approach New Year's resolution season, when we're at our most susceptible to the idea of quick-fix diets, we checked in with some of our experts to find out whether *their* experts got it right.

This year's rankings place the Mediterranean and DASH diets tied for the top spot, and Keto in last place. Buzzy diets like Paleo and Whole30 place in the bottom 10 as well. Among the other top ranking diets are Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig, and Flexitarian.

It's worth noting that both of our interviewed experts felt that the list overall was both unoriginal and a bit misleading (not to mention major click-bait fodder).

SHOULD KETO REALLY BE RANKED LOWEST?

The Ketogenic Diet was dinged for being both difficult to follow and showing little evidence for long-term weight loss (it did rank highly for short-term weight loss).

"I agree completely that keto has little evidence for long-term weight loss, because that's the truth," says Dain Wallis, Health Coach and co-founder of Move Daily. "This goes hand-in-hand with the fact that keto is impossible for most people follow for an extended period of time."

Nathalie Niddam, a nutritionist and Bulletproof Human Potential Coach who herself subscribes to a ketogenic diet (though she cycles in and out) felt the U.S. News experts were evaluating keto on the wrong set of criteria.

"Keto is a lifestyle, not a diet," she says. "To be done well it needs to first be ascertained that it is appropriate for the individual, it needs to be well designed (include lots of green leafy vegetables, avoid using bacon as a staple etc) and....there's a growing body of evidence that for most people it's likely most beneficial to include some kind of cycling in and out of ketosis be it weekly, monthly, seasonally or what have you. By doing this, you mitigate the downsides, make it sustainable for the long term and eventually settle into a lifestyle that will yield the best results in terms of health and weight loss."

Courtesy of Unsplash

WHAT ABOUT PALEO AND WHOLE30?

Paleo, the diet that suggests you should avoid any foods a caveman wouldn't eat (think: eschewing processed, packaged foods – including anything with gluten – in favor of veggies, fruit, and a lot of protein) took heat for being pricey, difficult to follow, and known for short-term weight loss versus long-term.

"Paleo is a great foundational diet because it prioritizes nutrient-dense foods," explains Wallis, "but for most people it's too restrictive, and some of the Paleo 'rules' are asinine; conceptually, calling it 'Paleo' is also a bit of a joke, but that's another topic in and of itself."

Whole30, the elimination diet that has you remove all inflammatory foods from your diet (sugar, booze, grains, dairy, etc) and stick to Whole30-approved foods, was labeled "extremely restrictive," and lacking in scientific support, as well as being difficult to follow.

"Whole30 is awful because it inevitably encourages yo-yo dieting, which is very unhealthy in the long-term," Wallis tells us. "Eliminating problem foods is a great idea, but we are all different and will all have different problem foods, and introducing a super restrictive 30 days for most people is unnecessary and will lead most down a disappointing road. No diet should have a timeline on it of any sort, because health doesn't work that way."

Courtesy of Unsplash

OK SO WHAT IS THE BEST DIET?

The U.S. New experts selected DASH, which emphasizes making small changes (like adding one fruit or vegetable to every meal) over time, to help stop high blood pressure. They also selected lifestyle diets like the vegetarian diet and the Mediterranean diet. However, more corporate-sourced plans like Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig, and The Biggest Loser Diet also made it into the upper half of the list.

So we asked our experts: with so many options out there, how do we find the diet that's best for us?

"I believe that the best diet for an individual is one that is Bio Individual," says Niddam. "It needs to be personalized based on several factors: ethnicity, genetic predispositions, food sensitivities and current health status. Age and stage of life also come in to play. It's likely that for many people they may have to adopt different eating plans at different stages of their life as their health status and lifestyle evolves.

"Having said that, your genetics never change and they can determine your need for certain micronutrients and your tolerance for various foods (from salt, to starch, to saturated fat and beyond)."

Wallis takes a similar approach, breaking it down in a way we can all understand.

"There is no best diet for everyone," he tells us. "As a general rule, prioritize things the body needs (think nutrients-first, one-ingredient whole foods), sprinkle in some things you really like (so that you can maintain this way of eating), eat slowly, and don't treat food as entertainment. Accept that changing your body takes time and enjoy the process of taking care of yourself."

Courtesy of Unsplash

WHAT ABOUT THAT NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION?

Turns out "get healthier" is one of the most popular resolutions we make in january, along with "exercise more." But just as the gym clears out mid-February when those who have set unrealistic goals hit a snag and give up altogether, so too do we make one slip in our diet plan and ditch the whole thing. Which is why Wallis says for long-term success, we need to focus instead on changing our mindset and habits.

"People need to stop searching for magical diets and start looking in the mirror," he says. "It's not just the 'what' you're eating, but the 'how' and 'why.' Without addressing your mindset and habits around eating, no diet is going to stick. Permanent weight loss requires permanent changes to your daily food choices and habits.

"If your New Year's resolution is to lose weight, don't start adhering to the arbitrary rules of a new diet – start by filling your fridge with better foods, by deleting your food-delivery apps, and by changing your daily commute to avoid poor after-work food choices. Set your environment for success and good decisions become far easier to make."

Dain Wallis is a health coach and co-founder of Move Daily, which provides full-service health coaching to clients around the world. You can find Move Daily here and on Instagram here.

Nathalie Niddam works one on one with clients and has recently launched an online group coaching program to help women identify and adopt the best lifestyle and diet for them. Find her online here and on Instagram here.

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