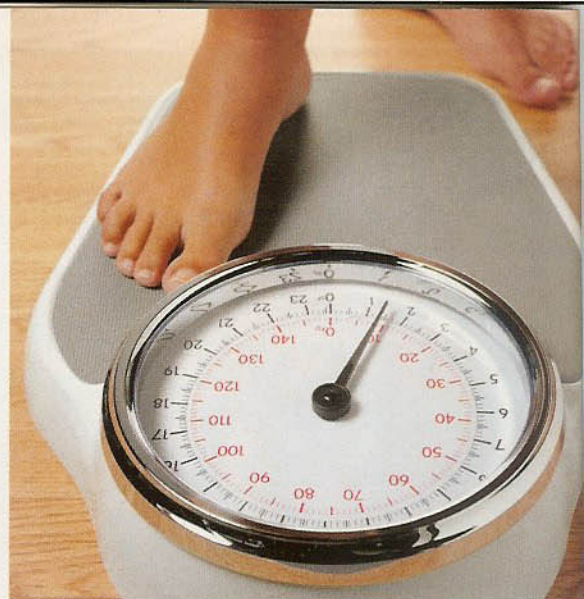


Diets Worth Trying – or Dodging

Experts weigh in on three popular plans.

KEEPING EXCESS POUNDS AT BAY AND EATING THE RIGHT FOODS are critical to keeping joint pain in check. But not all weight-loss plans are effective – or safe – and not every diet is a good choice for someone with arthritis. We asked three dietitians for the skinny on three headline-grabbing plans. —A.P.



PALEO

This “caveman” diet includes only foods that could be hunted or gathered.

PROS: Prohibits processed foods; pushes nuts, fruits and veggies. Meats are free-range and grass-fed, and fish are wild – all high in anti-inflammatory fats.

CONS: It doesn't limit meats and it doesn't include certain nutritious food groups, including bone-healthy dairy and nutrient-rich whole grains, says registered dietitian Mira Ilic at Cleveland Clinic.

BOTTOM LINE: This diet can be high in inflammation-promoting saturated fat, says Rebecca Solomon, director of clinical nutrition at Mount Sinai Beth Israel in New York City. It may also be difficult to stick with because the diet is limited.

MEDITERRANEAN

Fresh fruits and vegetables, whole foods and healthy fats are mainstays.

PROS: It's composed of foods with beneficial components, such as olive oil's oleocanthal, which has anti-inflammatory properties similar to ibuprofen. Fruits, veggies and whole grains are good sources of antioxidants and fiber, and fatty fish are rich in inflammation-fighting omega-3 fatty acids.

CONS: Eating fresh foods requires frequent shopping and preparation.

BOTTOM LINE: The Mediterranean diet is a good choice, emphasizing nutrient-rich, fresh foods without added fats, sugars and processed products. Frozen produce can also be used, says registered dietitian Bonnie Taub-Dix, author of *Read It Before You Eat It* (Plume, 2010).

DASH

The Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension diet emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat sources of protein.

PROS: Proven to lower blood pressure in just 14 days, the diet promotes more whole foods and low-fat dairy and less red meat, sweets and sodium.

CONS: Cutting convenience foods and amping up fruit and veggie intake can be difficult. You have to pay attention to labels, says Ilic. If food comes out of a package or off a menu, chances are, it's not DASH-friendly.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a healthy diet for anyone – not just people with arthritis or hypertension. It's the hands-down winner among registered dietitians and leading health authorities.

➔ Learn more about these and other popular diets at arthritis.org/ArthritisTodayMA15.

DIET TRAPS: Don't Fall for the Wrong Plan

With new diets making headlines every day, it can be hard to determine which plans might ease achy joints and which might make arthritis symptoms worse. Eating foods rich in disease-fighting compounds, including fruits, vegetables and whole grains, can help fight inflammation, but no diet can cure arthritis, says registered dietitian Mira Ilic. Use these guidelines to spot fads and pick good plans.

>**Avoid diets that promise fast results.** Healthy eating is a lifestyle, not a month-long endeavor.

>**Don't nix entire food groups.** If a diet loads up on one “super food” or only a few foods, it's not likely to be nutri-

tionally balanced. “Whenever you eliminate entire categories of foods, you could miss out on necessary nutrients,” says Ilic.

>**Steer clear of strict diets.** Diets that are difficult to follow and tough to stick with may provide short-term results but usually don't last long-term.

>**Be aware of food sensitivities.** Some people may see an improvement in their arthritis symptoms if they cut out certain ingredients, says Ilic. To try it, eliminate the suspects for a few weeks, then add them back, one at a time, and gauge your symptoms.