

Alternative Diets

What are Alternative Diets?

There is no precise definition of an alternative diet. There are a broad range of various diets. For example, vegetarian, macrobiotic, organic, diets that emphasis or restrict certain nutrients or foods and many more.

Why?

- Tradition
- Religion
- Healthy life
- Economic/ethical reasons
- Ecological considerations
- Fashion

Are They Good or Bad?

The main criteria that decides whether a diet is appropriate is the *spectrum of foods consumed*. The broader the diet, the more adequate the diet is to fulfill the desired proportions of energy from different food groups. The desirable proportion of energy provided by proteins = 8-15%; fat = 20-30%; saccharides = 55-60%.

Examples of Alternative Diets

Vegetarian Diet

Vegetarian diets can be with or without some animal foods. *With* some animal foods:

- Demi-vegetarians- no red meat, but all other foods
- Lacto-ovo-vegetarians- no meat, but milk, milk products, eggs and all vegetable foods eaten
- Lacto-vegetarians- no meat or eggs, but milk, milk products and all vegetable food eaten

If meals within this diet are composed well, they are even adequate for children. If lots of fruit and vegetables are eaten, then more fibre, vitamins and minerals are consumed, as well as less fat and less saturated fatty acids. With this diet, one can maintain a better weight due to lower energy density than the common diet. Also, this lifestyle may be healthier because vegetarians usually do not drink alcohol or smoke.

Without any animal foods:

- Vegans- only vegetable foods
- Fruitarian- fruits only, including vegetables that are botanically fruits (tomatoes, cucumbers etc)
- Vitarians- raw vegetables and fruits, no grain foods.

These diets are not considered adequate for children, especially fruitarian and vitarian diets. Children would need to consume large volumes of food, which is not feasible, in order to fulfil the desired nutrition guidelines because these diets have a low fat and protein content. High quality protein can be obtained from animal foods. The protein from animal foods is of better quality than protein from plant products.

Examples of *vegetable sources of protein*:

- Grains- 6 grams of protein/ 100 grams in ready to eat products. The limiting amino acids are lysine and tryptophan.
- Pulses (beans, peas and lentils)- ~10-20g protein/ 100g when boiled. The limiting amino acids are methionine and cysteine.
- Nuts and seeds- ~8-19g protein/ 100g. But they have a high energy content 1300-2700kj/100g

Therefore it is necessary to combine plant sources in order to obtain necessary protein.

Other important nutrients to consider:

- Iron- Red meat is a good source of iron. Iron in vegetable sources (green leafy vegetables) is less bioavailable but vitamin C helps to increase absorption.
- Vitamin B₁₂ and zinc- Meat, fish and poultry are all good sources. There is no vitamin B₁₂ in vegetable foods. Wholegrain products do contain zinc but it is in a less bioavailable form.
- Vitamin D- Fish oil, fatty fish, egg yolk, butter are good sources of vitamin D. There is no vitamin D in vegetable foods.

Atkins' Diet

This is a low carbohydrate diet with high meat/ high fat. Diets that are excessive in protein and rich in saturated fats are not considered healthy by most nutrition organisations and the vast majority of medical professionals.

Macrobiotic Diet

This dietary regimen splits food into groups:

- Yin: spices, sugar, drinks, oils, fruits, milk products, some vegetables
- Harmonic food- *rice* (most harmonic of all foods) cereals, pulses, some vegetables
- Yang- fish, meat, eggs, salt

The principle of diet is to limit or balance the foods in the yin and yang groups and eat mostly harmonic foods. There are various degrees of this diet. The less strict degrees have similar advantages of vegetarian diets with some animal products. The stricter degrees are not adequate to meet dietary requirements. There is a possibility of deficiency of vitamin D, C, B₁₂, folic acid, iron, zinc due to excess fibre interfering with absorption of nutrients.

Organic Diet

Organic diet consists of foods that have been produced by methods that do not use pesticides, herbicides, fertilisers and no industrially processed food.

Divided Food Diet

This diet was developed by William Howard Hay. It divides food into three groups: acidic, neutral and alkaline. Acidic food cannot be combined with alkaline foods. Examples of acidic food are protein (meat, milk, eggs)- they are digested in an acid environment. Examples of alkaline food are saccharides (potato, rice, bread, banana). Neutral food can be combined with either acidic or alkaline foods.

Adamo's Diet

This diet is a blood group diet. The principle is that a chemical reaction occurs between the blood and foods as they are digested, therefore people with different blood groups should eat different foods.

- Blood group O described as the hunter-gatherers. This is the oldest group.
- Blood group A described as agrarian or cultivator
- Blood group B described as balance or nomad
- Blood group AB described as a mix between A and B.

This diet is not evidence-based but has no ill effects.

Links

Bibliography

- BENCKO, Vladimir, et al. *Hygiene and epidemiology : selected chapters*. 2. edition. Prague. 2008. ISBN 80-246-0793-X.