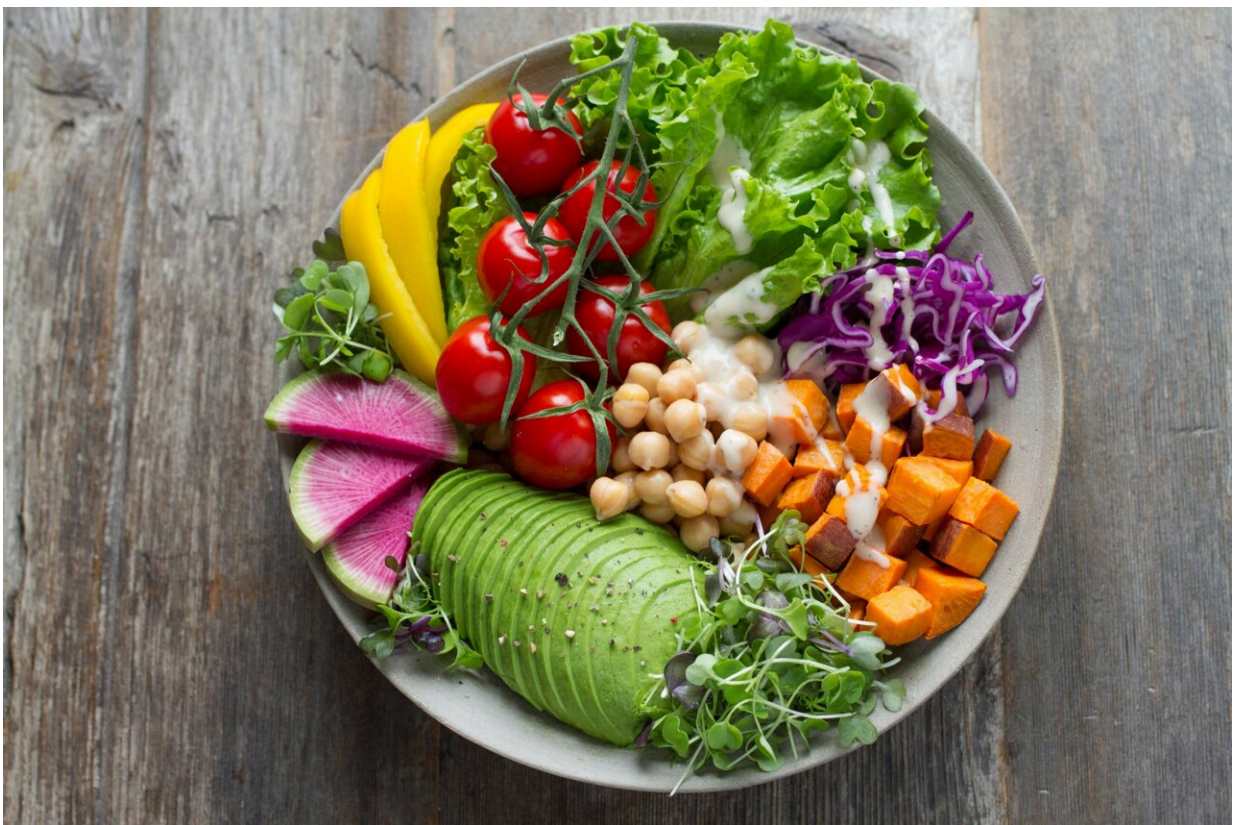# Thinking of trying a new diet? Here are 4 questions to ask yourself before you do

September 4 2024, by Melissa Eaton, Verena Vaiciurgis and Yasmine Probst

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We live in a society that glorifies dieting, with around [42% of adults globally](#) having tried to lose weight. Messages about [dieting and weight](#)

loss are amplified on social media, with a never-ending cycle of weight loss fads and diet trends.

Amid often conflicting messages and misinformation, if you're looking for diet advice online, it's easy to become confused and overwhelmed.

So before diving into the latest weight loss trend or extreme diet, consider these four questions to help you make a more informed decision.

1. Is the diet realistic?

Have you considered the financial cost of maintaining the diet or lifestyle, and the time and resources that would be required? For example, do you need to purchase specific products, supplements, or follow a rigid meal plan?

If the diet is coming from someone who is trying to sell you something—such as a particular weight-loss product you need in order to follow the diet—this could be a particular red flag.

Many extreme diet recommendations come from a place of privilege and overlook food access, affordability, cooking skills, where you live, or even your culture and ethics.

If the diet has these sorts of issues it can lead to frustration, stress, stigmatization and feelings of failure for the person trying to adhere to the diet. But the problem may be with the diet itself—not with you.

2. Is there evidence to support this diet?

Self-proclaimed "experts" online will often make claims focused on

specific groups, known as [target populations](link). This might be 30- to 50-year-old men with diabetes, for example.

In some cases, evidence for claims made may come from animal studies, which might not be applicable to humans at all.

So be aware that if research findings are for a group that doesn't match your profile, then the results might not be relevant to you.

It takes time and a lot of high-quality studies to tell us a "diet" is safe and effective, not just one study. Ask yourself, is it supported by multiple studies in humans? Be critical and question the claims before you accept them.

For [accurate information](link) look for government websites, or ask your GP or dietitian.

3. How will this diet affect my life?

Food is much more than calories and nutrients. It plays many roles in our lives, and likewise, diets can influence our lives in ways we often overlook.

Socially and culturally, food can be a point of [connection and celebration](link). It can be a source of enjoyment, a [source of](link) comfort, or even a way to explore new parts of the world.

So when you're considering a new diet, think about how it might affect meaningful moments for you. For example, if you're going traveling, will your diet influence the food choices you make? Will you feel that you can't sample the local cuisine? Or would you be deterred from going out for dinner with friends because of their choice of restaurant?

4. Will this diet make me feel guilty or affect my mental health?

What is your favorite meal? Does this diet "allow" you to eat it? Imagine visiting your mother, who has prepared your favorite childhood meal. How will the diet affect your feelings about these special foods? Will it cause you to feel stressed or guilty about enjoying a birthday cake or a meal cooked by a loved one?

Studies have shown that dieting can negatively impact our mental health, and skipping meals can increase symptoms of depression and anxiety.

Many diets fail to consider the psychological aspects of eating, even though our mental health is just as important as physical health. Eating should not make you feel stressed, anxious, or guilty.

So before starting another diet, consider how it might affect your mental health.

Moving away from a dieting mindset

We're frequently told that weight loss is the path to better health. However, we can prioritize our health without focusing on our weight. Constant messages about the need to lose weight can also be harmful to mental health, and not necessarily helpful for physical health.

Our research has found eating in a way that prioritizes health over weight loss is linked to a range of positive outcomes for our health and well-being. These include a more positive relationship with food, and less guilt and stress.

Our research also indicates mindful and intuitive eating

practices—which focus on internal cues, body trust, and being present and mindful when eating—are related to lower levels of depression and stress, and greater body image and self-compassion.

But like anything, it takes practice and time to build a positive relationship with food. Be kind to yourself, seek out weight-inclusive health-care professionals, and the changes will come. Finally, remember you're allowed to find joy in food.

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