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## The latest thin

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By [SUSAN FRICK CARLMAN](#) Staff Writer

For those of us who eat, there's a lot of bad information out there.

Consider, for example, the Maple Syrup Diet - a regimen involving lemon juice, a touch of cayenne pepper and the distilled sweet nectar of the tree. Never mind that its other, more-ominous name is the Master Cleanse Diet; Beyonce Knowles reportedly geared up to play her svelte character in "Dreamgirls" by shedding 20 pounds on the aggressive non-eating plan. What's not to like?

And remember the Grapefruit Diet? That one had us taking a serving of the tart fruit with every downsized meal? This strategy has been backed by assorted folks with ties to Florida's citrus growers.

Even the relatively mainstream approaches to weight loss that were ranked anew in a Stanford University study reported last week (the carbohydrate-starvation Atkins Plan bested the Zone, LEARN and Ornish diets, in case you missed it) overlook the point long emphasized by nutritionists, until their faces turn blueberry-hued: There is no magic bullet. Any effort to lose weight that has starting and stopping dates is by its very definition doomed to fail. Why? It's simple: the body is a creature of habit. As soon as you give up your abstemious ways, it will almost always remember its larger, more-familiar size, and head back toward that critical mass - and often beyond, unfortunately.

March is National Nutrition Month, and this year the observance is tackling fad diets. Operating under the banner "100 Percent Fad-Free," public information efforts coordinated by the American Dietetic Association are aiming to de-bunk the notion that the road to lasting weight loss, health and vitality is short and pothole-free.

That's a tall order in a nation that has chased such illusory promises for the past couple of centuries.

"The trouble is, Americans don't want to change anything that they do. They want to lose weight without making any change in their diets or their exercise habits, said Christine Palumbo, a Naperville dietitian in private practice who also serves on the ADA's board of directors. "We are looking for a magic bullet, a fad diet, something revolutionary, something new under the sun. There is nothing new under the sun. There is nothing revolutionary. It still involves sacrifice, but the direction that we're leaning is away from making major changes in our dietary habits ... and large reductions in calorie intake."

Instead, Palumbo and other experts in the field urge people to make gentle and permanent changes in the way they eat - and to exercise reasonably as a way of driving home the point. The idea is to let the body think it came up with the idea, so its metabolism isn't riled by the changes.

"If you do it the right way, most of us barely even notice," said Palumbo, who stresses that small changes can lead to big results, but not overnight. "If we reduce the calories very gradually, the metabolic rate doesn't change."

Diets that introduce drastic shifts in the body's systems can pose risks such as the electrolyte imbalance that can result from "cleanse" plans. Palumbo said the Eat Right 4 Your Type diet, a program based on blood type that has been around for a decade or so, has no research attesting to its effectiveness.

"It's a gimmick," she said. "When it says 'revolutionary,' red flag. When it says 'the medical community doesn't believe in it,' red flag. Any diet that encourages you to eliminate entire food groups - red flag. Any diet that prohibits you from enjoying small amounts of the food you enjoy - red flag."

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