

# **Volunteer Leader Training Guide**

## **Sensible Eating in a Fad Diet Era**

Rosemary Rodibaugh, Ph.D., R.D., L.D., Professor - Nutrition Specialist

### **Introduction**

Nearly two-thirds of American adults are overweight or obese, and we are not happy about it. Last year we spent close to \$50 million on weight-loss products and books in an attempt to lose the excess weight. For those of us who have considered a weight-loss program, there is certainly no shortage of choices.

If you are thinking about a weight-loss diet, you are probably wondering which diet to choose. The fact is, it probably doesn't matter. The reason fad diets work – in the short term, anyway – is that they restrict calories. If you follow the meal plans and portions of the leading fad diet plans, you are likely eating fewer calories than you normally eat. Considering that the average daily calorie intake for most adult Americans is higher than the amount burned, it would be almost impossible not to lose weight.

Weight-loss diets come and go. But, research shows that there is only one way to successfully shed pounds: burn off more calories than you take in. Any diet plan that restricts calories to less than you burn is going to work in the short run. However, the focus should be the long run and overall good health, not just good looks.

A well-balanced diet combined with portion control and daily physical activity is more healthful than one that eliminates certain foods or concentrates on cutting certain nutrients. It can be very hard to stick to a diet over the long term that cuts out entire food groups. Studies have found that up to 95 percent of all dieters regain lost weight after a year – and even add more pounds.

Still, food-restriction diets are enormously popular. They can be easy to follow and often produce immediate results. This training will look at claims and concerns of popular diets and discuss what research shows is the best diet for healthy weight.

### **Target Audience**

- Adults and teens

## Objectives

- Participants will learn facts and concerns about current fad diets.
- Participants will learn what to look for in a healthy diet plan.
- Participants will learn about the weight management recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPyramid food guidance system.

## Main Teaching Points

- Fad diets are temporary diet plans that restrict calories and may cause short-term weight loss.
- Healthy weight-loss plans incorporate changes a person can live with for a lifetime. They are realistic, nutritionally balanced, control portion sizes and include physical activity.
- The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans suggests choosing foods that are low in calories for a given measure of food, such as vegetables, fruits and some soups. These foods tend to have a lot of moisture and help you feel full.
- MyPyramid can help you make daily food choices for a healthy weight.

## Suggestions for Teaching

Prior to teaching the lesson:

- Review introduction and main teaching points above and study handouts.
- Make copies of handouts and evaluation form for each participant.

Outline for teaching the lesson:

Introduce the program by asking: How many of you have tried one of the low-carbohydrate diets? *Allow participants to respond to the question with raised hands.* Mention that Americans spend approximately \$46 million a year on weight-loss products and books.

Use the **Introduction** in this leader's guide to start lesson.

Distribute the **How to Spot a Fad Diet** activity and give participants a few minutes to answer. Ask if anyone answered yes to any of the questions. Let participants tell which diets they were thinking of and to which question they answered yes.

Mention that a fad diet is one that is temporary in nature. The word *fad* as defined in the dictionary is "a temporary fashion, or a temporary manner of conduct followed enthusiastically by a group." Therefore, a "fad diet" should be defined as a "temporary diet."

We know that to achieve or maintain a healthy weight a person must find a diet plan that they can stay on. A good weight loss plan should:

- include realistic goals.
- promote a safe rate of loss of 1-2 pounds a week.

- be low in fat and provide vegetables, fruits, low-fat dairy foods, lean meats, fiber and whole grains.
- recommend three smaller meals and snacks a day.
- control portion sizes.
- limit the amount of fast food, high-fat cheese, butter, fried foods, high-fat snacks and desserts.
- recommend weighing only once a week and keeping a diary of the food you eat.
- suggest ways to be more active in your daily life.

Distribute and briefly discuss **The Scoop on Popular Weight-Loss Diets**. Look at characteristics of safe and effective weight-loss plans. Select one or two diets that participants have tried and look at the strengths, weaknesses and comments on those diets. Discuss whether the diets meet the characteristics.

Introduce the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans provides science-based advice to promote health and to reduce risks for chronic diseases through diet and physical activity. The recommendations contained within the Dietary Guidelines are targeted to the general public over two years of age who are living in the United States. By law, the Dietary Guidelines is reviewed, updated if necessary, and published every five years.

Distribute **Finding Your Way to a Healthier You** handout and mention that it summarizes the recommendations of the 2005 Dietary Guidelines. More detailed information can be found at [www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines](http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines). The most recent edition has a greater focus on healthy weight and offers the following suggestions for weight management:

- To maintain body weight in a healthy range, balance calories from foods and beverages with calories expended.
- To prevent gradual weight gain over time, make small decreases in food and beverage calories and increase physical activity.
- The healthiest way to reduce calorie intake is to reduce the intake of added sugars, fats and alcohol.
- Control portion sizes to limit calorie intake.
- For those who need to lose weight, aim for a slow, steady weight loss by decreasing calorie intake while maintaining an adequate nutrient intake and increasing physical activity.
- To help manage body weight and prevent gradual, unhealthy body weight gain in adulthood, engage in approximately 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity activity on most days of the week while not exceeding caloric intake requirements.
- To sustain weight loss in adulthood, participate in at least 60 to 90 minutes of daily moderate-intensity physical activity while not exceeding caloric intake requirements. Some people may need to consult with a healthcare provider before participating in this level of activity.

Ask participants to suggest ways they can incorporate the above recommendations into their daily lives. For example: What small changes could they make to cut calories? increase activity? How can they get 60 minutes of physical activity each day? 90 minutes?

Distribute copies of the **MyPyramid: Steps to a Healthier You** handout. Point out the following:

- The MyPyramid Food Guide was developed to carry the messages of the dietary guidelines and to make Americans aware of the important health benefits of small and simple improvements in nutrition, physical activity and lifestyle behavior. It is a personalized approach designed to remind us to make healthy food choices and be active every day. More information is available at [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov).
- Like the old Pyramid, food is still categorized into food groups. Each of the triangles in the pyramid represents a food group. From left to right...grains, vegetables, fruits, oils, milk, meat and beans. How much of each food group you should eat depends on your calorie need for age, gender and activity level. Twelve calorie levels are included for males and females ages 2-76+, with activity levels of sedentary, moderately active and active.
- For the first time, USDA Food Guidance includes recommendations for physical activity. This is in response to the increase in sedentary lifestyles in America. Recommendations are the same as those in the Dietary Guidelines.
- The food group triangles that make up the MyPyramid are wider at the bottom and get narrower as they go up to the tip of the pyramid. The wider base represents foods with little or no solid fats or added sugar. It is wider to show that you should choose these foods more often. The narrow top area represents foods within each group that contain more added sugars and solid fats. You can fit some of these foods into your daily choices if you are more active.
- The MyPyramid graphic includes 6 colorful bands representing the 5 food groups and oils. The widths suggest how much food a person should choose from each food group. These are just general guides. How much from each food group you need depends, again, on your calorie needs which depend on your age, gender and activity level. It also shows that foods from all groups are needed each day for good health. Each food group makes a distinct contribution to meeting your nutritional needs. All are needed. Oils are included for the first time because research shows that vegetable oils and oils in some fish contain fatty acids that are important for health. To help clear up the confusion between servings and portions, the amount of food recommended from each food group is given in common measures – cups and ounces – instead of servings. If time permits, discuss the **MyPyramid Serving Equivalents Guide**.

Thankfully, the USDA recognizes that no one can make the changes in their diet and activity patterns overnight in order to follow their MyPyramid recommendations. One small step at a time...steps to a healthier you...can be important to making great improvements in your health.

If you have access to the Internet, go to [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov). Demonstrate how to find an individual's calorie level by filling in age, gender (male or female) and activity level. Then look at how much of each of the food groups is recommended for the calorie level. You'll also find tips and resources to help implement the food plan.

Ask participants to complete the program evaluation. Go over the instructions making sure they understand they should first answer what they plan to do since completing the program. Then they should think back to before the program and answer what they were planning to do then.

## **Handouts**

- How to Spot a Fad Diet
- The Scoop on Popular Weight-Loss Diets
- Finding Your Way to a Healthier You
- MyPyramid: Steps to a Healthier You
- MyPyramid Serving Equivalents Guide