

Eat a variety of foods to ensure a balanced diet

Ensure provision of extra food and healthcare during pregnancy and lactation

Ensure exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months and continue breastfeeding till two years and beyond

Drink an adequate quantity of water

Ensure adequate and appropriate diets for children and adolescents, both in health and sickness

Start feeding homemade semi-solid complementary foods to the infant soon after six months of age

Use oils/fats in moderation; choose a variety of oilseeds, nuts and legumes to meet daily needs for fats and essential fatty acids (EFA)

Eat plenty of legumes and vegetables

Adopt a healthy lifestyle to prevent abdominal obesity, overweight and overall obesity

Obtain good-quality proteins and essential amino acids (EAA) through an appropriate combination of foods and avoid protein supplements to build muscle mass

Restrict salt intake

Be physically active and exercise regularly to maintain good health

Consume safe & hygienic foods

Adopt appropriate pre-cooking and cooking methods



Minimise the consumption of high-fat, sugar, and salt (HFSS) and ultra-processed foods (UPFs)

Read information on food labels to make informed and healthy food choices



ANNA JOSE @ Kochi

MANU (name changed) was 35-years-old when he started a low-carbohydrate diet and a workout regimen on the advice of a lifestyle trainer. His aim was simple – weight loss, just like any other youngster. However, the attempt did not go well, as he felt low on energy quite often and even found it difficult to go about his daily routine.

“In the initial days, he was satisfied with the new diet and exercise. However, later he started experiencing mood swings and acidity, and was not even able to complete the workout. His sleep was also disturbed. The guy came to me for a second opinion,” recalls Dr Manju George, chief dietitian at VPS Lakeshore Hospital, Kochi, who treated the youngster. The issues in the diet pattern had led to low energy. His quest to maintain the “ideal” weight for his height led him to follow a strict diet. “For his body’s nature and requirements, he needs to consume some carbs – though not as an exact meal. So I suggested an apt workout for strength with the support of a trainer and created a meal plan consisting of 40-50% carbohydrates, with proteins and fats making up 20-30% each. He was also recommended to have dinner early and sleep well,” she said. After following the regimen consistently for six months, he began showing healthy weight loss and improved overall health.

According to Dr Manju, the number of people who blindly follow unhealthy diet plans – no-sugar, low-carb diets – is on the rise. “Nowadays, we see many people who diet and exercise for weight loss. With social media influencers advocating new diet patterns and boosting their content, people tend to follow such routines. However, the diet plan for everyone is different,” she said, adding that people in the 25–35 age group are more likely to follow such no-sugar diet trends due to peer pressure to maintain the perfect figure.

With the growing trend and popularity of no-sugar diets, medical experts warn that extreme no-sugar and low-carb diets, often promoted online, may lead to fatigue, cravings and nutritional imbalance if followed without medical guidance.



NO-SUGAR, LOW CARB DIET TO LOSE WEIGHT?

A STRICT NO



Who needs a no-sugar diet?

A completely ‘no sugar’ diet is generally unnecessary for most individuals. “Reducing the intake of added sugars can be beneficial, particularly for people with conditions such as prediabetes, type-2 diabetes, obesity, metabolic syndrome, fatty liver disease, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), high triglyceride levels, and frequent dental cavities. For most healthy individuals, moderation and mindful consumption are more appropriate than complete elimination of sugar. Excessively restrictive no-sugar diets may not be sustainable and, in some cases, can increase cravings and contribute to unhealthy binge-eating patterns,” said Dr Niveditha P, head of clinical nutrition at Amrita Hospital, Kochi.

“If you are living with diabetes, you don’t necessar-

ily have to cut out every single gram of sugar forever. Instead, focus on choosing ‘slow-burning’ carbs (like whole grains and vegetables) and cutting back on added sugars like soda and sweets. Weight becomes a health concern when your Body Mass Index (BMI) moves into the ‘overweight’ or ‘obese’ categories, as this puts extra strain on your heart and metabolism. People in their 20s are generally better at burning energy. Staying active and eating slightly fewer calories than you burn will help. However, in case of family history of heart disease or diabetes, consulting a doctor is mandatory. The average blood sugar (HbA1c), kidney and liver health, and vitamin levels should be tested to build a workout and meal plan that actually works for your specific body,” said Dr Ravikanth, bariatric surgeon at Rajagiri Hospital, Aluva.

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