

## Episode 19 – The Best Diets of 2018!

This is the TD Fitness Podcast with Coach T, Episode Number 19.

Welcome to the TD Fitness Podcast, giving you ways to live a healthy lifestyle without giving up the things that make life worth living. Now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

What's up TD Fitness family? Welcome back to another episode here at TD Fitness. I'm your host, Coach T, and in this episode we talk about nutrition, specifically the 2018 best diet rankings. You see, each year US News and the World Report ranks popular diets, it's in its eighth year this year of them doing that and the 2018 list was released this month. Basically what happens is, they get a panel of nationally recognized experts in different fields; diet, nutrition, obesity, food psychology which is a good category, I'm glad they're including that this year, diabetes, heart disease experts.

They perform scoring of 40 popular diets and they score them in seven different categories; how easy it is to follow, the effectiveness in weight loss both short and long term, nutritional completeness, safety, and the potential for preventing and managing both diabetes and heart disease. I really like the structure, the way that they do it because it looks at more than just nutrition. If you have a diet that is the best from a nutrition standpoint but you can't follow it because it's overly restrictive then it doesn't do you much good, right?

It addresses long term weight loss which I particularly like because that sounds a lot like the lifestyle change principles that I teach here at TD Fitness and in the Fit Life Program. What we're going to do in this episode, we're going to look at the top diets of those 40. I also picked a couple of diets that have gained some relatively recent popularity just to see how they scored because I feel it's part of my duty to keep you all informed and aware of the facts related to the trends and new strategies in the health and fitness arena.

Then I'll provide some insight on dieting based on the metric that I use for dietary assessments as a guide in teaching about healthy eating. It's the TD Fitness Diet Planning Principles Version 2.0. See, I created the initial version some time ago but just recently revamped it for this year's iteration of the Fit Life Program. This single page PDF has been the most popular handout of anything I've created at TD Fitness.

The page on the site that houses this handout and the blog post has been viewed over 6,000 times and that's what actually lead me to create the cheat sheet which is the most popular download, like I said. I recently created version two and now you get that new and improved version. That's going to be the freebie for this episode, you can find that at [tdfitness.net/019download](http://tdfitness.net/019download), and it's called Diet Planning Principles 2.0.

I'll say too that this episode draws heavily from the findings presented by the experts in the US News and World Report ranking. I wanted to provide the data as it was presented with my thoughts

added for your benefit. I'll provide a link to those rankings in the Resources Section of the show notes for this episode. I think the site does a very good job of explaining so many of the details associated with all of the diets that they looked at and it's very clear and self-explanatory.

My job here is to be more of a curator of sorts, I'll provide what I think are the most pertinent aspects with respect to the TD Fitness tenets of nutrition, fitness, and positive lifestyle change. Let's jump right into it and talk about which diets top the charts. Number one is the DASH Diet. If you're unfamiliar with this, DASH stands for the Dietary Approach to Stop Hypertension, it's for preventing and lowering high blood pressure.

The DASH Diet has actually been in the top spot since the rankings were created so it's an eight time number one pick, if you will. It scores well in the categories of short and long term weight loss, easy to follow, had a very high score in the healthiness category, and it doesn't restrict entire food groups. An example or kind of an idea of what a 2,000 calorie diet may look like, six to eight servings of grains per day, four to five each of vegetables and fruit, a few servings of fat free or low fat dairy, six or fewer servings of lean meat, poultry or fish, and then on a weekly basis four to five servings of nuts, seeds, legumes, a couple of servings of fats and oils, and five or fewer servings per week of sweets. Then DASH suggests capping the sodium intake at 2300 milligrams a day, eventually working to stay around 1500 milligrams per day.

That's the DASH Diet. It looks a whole lot like the USDA recommended intakes, at least for a 2,000 calorie diet. Also tied with the DASH Diet at number one was the Mediterranean Diet and this is the first time the Mediterranean Diet has hit the top spot. The rationale here is that those living in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea live longer and suffer less than most Americans from cancer and cardiovascular ailments. A diet low in red meat, low in sugar, low in saturated fat.

The thought is maybe the reason for this, it scored well just like the DASH Diet in short and long term weight loss, easy to follow, healthy, and it emphasizes eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans nuts, legumes, olive oil, and a variety of herbs and spices. Fish and seafood consumption is fine at least a couple of times a week, poultry, eggs, cheese, and yogurt in moderation, and saving the sweets and red meat though for special occasions. What a lot of people like about this diet though is that you can top it off with a glass of red wine if you want. It emphasizes that you should remember to stay healthy and active and you'll be all set.

The number three diet on the list was the Flexitarian Diet. This merges flexible eating and vegetarian eating. The goal is weight loss and optimal health, that's the advertised goal for the Flexitarian Diet. You don't have to eliminate meat completely to reap the benefits associated with vegetarianism, that's kind of the mantra for the Flexitarian Diet. You can be a vegetarian most of the time but still enjoy, as they say, a burger or steak when the urge hits.

Again, the categories of short and long term weight loss, sustainability in the sense that it's easy to follow and the healthiness of this diet. All three of these diets in the top three, they all score high in those categories. What I like particularly about the Flexitarian Diet is that it's more about adding foods than it is taking away. In my mind that's just a psychological shift that is easier for most people to follow.

With the Flexitarian Diet, it's about adding five groups of food in particular, these are what they call the new meats; things like tofu, beans, lentils, peas, nuts and seeds, and eggs, so those new proteins

if you will. Fruits and vegetables are the next category. Whole grains, dairy, and then final category, sugar and spices. The Flexitarian Diet also seems to be in line with the government's nutrient recommendations. Again, I go back to those USDA recommendations.

When it comes to weight loss though I wanted to mention that vegetarians weigh on average about 15% less than non-vegetarians. The obesity rate among vegetarians ranges from 0-6%. Compare that to a 33% obesity rate for the general population. The body weight of both male and female vegetarians is on average 3-20% lower than that of meat eaters. Now, my thoughts on this. Correlation doesn't necessarily mean causation so it doesn't necessarily mean that vegetarians weigh less because they eat less meat or don't eat meat.

Perhaps it's not the meat but rather the sugar intake that's associated with those who don't follow vegetarian diets, that could be what leads to increased weight gain. I'm just hypothesizing here but I just want to be clear that we don't know for sure that it's just meat that causes excess weight, is what I'm trying to get at. Typically, someone who practices a vegetarian diet is more conscious about what they eat, to include the amounts of foods that they are generally eating, and types of foods that ... They stay away from foods that are less healthy, generally speaking, things like over-consumption of sweets. It may not be as simple as a less meat thing so I just wanted to caution you on that.

Now, those are the top three. I wanted to talk a little bit about where some of the popular diets fall though as well, the whole 30 weight watchers so we'll talk about those a little bit. I'll start with Weight Watchers which actually came in at number four and it was number one in the weight loss diet's category. The rankings that I'm presenting to you are the overall rankings of all diets but they also broke them down into a number of different categories, one of those being the weight loss category.

Weight Watchers was number one in the weight loss diet's category. The Weight Watchers' approach says that there's more to weight loss than counting calories. If you make healthier choices and behavior changes you'll feel a lot better while losing weight. They have a new program, well somewhat new, it launched in 2015. It's called the Beyond the Scale Program and it has three components. When I say these three components you'll understand exactly why I'm a fan of these three components if you followed TD Fitness for any length of time.

The three components are eating healthier, fitness that fits your life, and learning skills and techniques that help you shift your mindset. Again, these are the exact same three principles that I teach in the Fit Life Program and the ones that I teach through the podcast, the blog, and essentially everything we do here with TD Fitness. I'm very much a fan of that component of the Weight Watchers Program. It scored well like the top three in short and long term weight loss. Like I said, scored highest in that category in particular. It's easy to follow and very healthy but how does it work?

Weight Watchers essentially assigns every food and beverage a, what they call a smart points value and it's based on nutrition content. Higher amounts of saturated fat and sugar will increase the point value and higher amounts of protein and maybe fiber bring the point value down. You get a certain number of points like money in the bank, if you will, and you can spend it as you may. The choices that fill you up the longest cost the least and nutritionally dense foods cost less than foods with empty calories.

A backbone of the plan is the different layers of access; from in-person meetings, to online chat or even on the telephone. It ranges from those different types to support from people who have lost weight using Weight Watchers, have kept the weight off, and have even been trained in behavioral weight management techniques which I think is a benefit.

The cost of Weight Watchers, they have several different categories ranging from the online portion which is just \$20 a month all the way up to what they call total access which can be up to \$70 a month. The ranges in there include different things like personal coaching and meetings and so forth. My thoughts on this, on particularly the Beyond the Scale Program, it sounds like a very good approach.

I like the behavior change emphasis, the support structure I also a solid component that many dietary approaches lack but that's something that a lot of people benefit from. I will tell you that several people that I've worked with have used Weight Watchers in the past or are using it now and this is one of the things that they say is a plus in the program, that is the support structure and having that community of like-minded people who are going through the same type of program.

The point structure I think is one that simplifies things for a lot of people too. I just want you to remember though that simplicity doesn't always equal the best approach because you lose some of the details about healthiness of a food if it's only represented by a point structure. For example, a food that is high in calorie content like avocados or olive oil, like good fats, they also have numerous health benefits. Now, I don't know where those particular foods in this example rank on the point scale for Weight Watchers but I just say that to say that you have to look at a food holistically in order to determine whether or not it's a healthy choice.

Now, some of the other popular diets. Jenny Craig came in at number 12 out of 40, Nutrisystem came in at 19 out of 40. The Paleo Diet which used to be pretty popular about eight years or so ago, I think they're still quite a few people that follow this approach, came in at number 32 out of 40. Paleo, for those of you who aren't familiar, Paleo advocates say that we should eat what we ate when we were hunting and gathering so what our ancestors ate as far as animal protein and plants.

Entire food groups though like dairy and grains are excluded and that makes it hard for dieters to get the nutrients they need. It's one of the few diets that the experts actually considered somewhat unsafe and only somewhat complete nutritionally. Then on to the Atkins Diet, number 36 out of 40. The comments on this were that it was way too much fat and too few carbs, in the view of the experts, and they questioned whether dieters could build a nutritious and safe diet with the severe restrictions imposed on vegetables and whole grains and fruits and things that generally we all agree are healthy for you.

Finally, the Whole 30 Diet. I've heard more about the Whole 30 Diet in the last year than any other time. This is, I think, fairly new to hit the scene. The Whole 30 came in pretty much at the bottom of the rankings, it aims ... The claim is that it aims to reset your body, identify food groups that disagree with your body, and treat medical conditions. It says that weight loss is almost always an added bonus.

The program itself is only 30 days long but it's a very restrictive 30 days. Absolutely no sugar, no alcohol, no grains, legumes or dairy. There's no cheating. If you cheat then it resets to day one, you have to start it all over. Will you lose weight? Probably. There's no independent research that's been conducted on the Whole 30 Diet specifically but diets like this one that eliminate entire food groups

typically make you drop weight. That was the case for 96% of about 1600 Whole 30 participants, according to a survey done by the company.

It says that most Whole 30 dieters lost between six and 15 pounds in that survey. I will say that the experts in the rankings here worried that the restrictive diets with no room for error can set followers up for failure and prompt them to not only put the pounds back on but actually gain more weight than they weighed initially once the diet is over. The rankings were not nice for the Whole 30 Diet. Some of the comments were no independent research, nonsensical claims, extreme restrictive, they pretty much slammed the Whole 30 Diet, almost all the panelists did. It tied with the Raw Food Diet as the worst of the worst for healthy eating. That is what I am presenting as far as the rankings go on the Whole 30 Diet. I know there have been a lot of questions about that so that's kind of where the rankings stand with the Whole 30.

That's a wrap up of the rankings. I want to talk a little bit about the construct now that I use to assess diets and how do I deem them healthy. Now, I'm going to caveat this by stating that I am a personal trainer and a health coach. When it comes to dietary advice though and particularly personalized approach to eating, a diet for you if you will, you should always seek the services of a professional, in this case a registered dietician.

Now that said, there are five general categories or principles that I feel are required in a safe, healthy, nutritionally sound approach to eating. It's easy to remember, just remember A through E. A, B, C, D, and E, that's the way I remember this. The A stands for an assortment or an array foods so you want different types of foods, some variety. It's unrealistic to eat the same foods every day. Variety provides a way of ensuring that you don't get bored with the foods you eat. It also gives you different amounts of nutrients from different types of food. A, again are an assortment or an array of different foods.

The B is for balance, the correct proportions of foods as they relate to one another. While your diet needs variety it also needs to be balanced. Protein, for example, is good for you but if all you eat is protein you're missing out on a lot of other nutrients. Similarly, broccoli is a super food. It provides fiber, antioxidants, vitamin C, but if the only vegetable you eat is broccoli then you're going to miss out on a host of other nutrients from other vegetables.

The C is for calorie control and moderation, essentially not consuming too much. There's been a lot of talk about calorie control when it comes to effective diets. Even in all the diets that we looked at here in the rankings, calorie control was mentioned as a metric when it comes to weight loss, so limiting calories and/or increasing your calorie burn. Many weight loss plans have this as the fundamental principle. It's largely believed that losing weight is as simple as consuming fewer calories than you expend. In fact, in the past I have stated this in years passed because that's what many personal trainers and health coaches are taught.

Likewise, many believe that if you take in more calories than your body burns then you'll gain weight, it's that simple, right? Well, not exactly. Each of those statements is at least partially true but as you may remember from some of the previous episodes here there's more to the story. Regardless though, keeping calorie intake to a normal level and not over-indulging is a dietary staple so that is something that is important in any diet.

Now, it's difficult at times to practice moderate though. Sometimes it's hard to stop yourself from eating too much of something that you really like but you should try to limit the amount of unhealthy foods you consume and those that have a high calorie content.

Next, the D is for nutrient density. This is the right types of foods. Nutrient density is a measure of the amount of nutrients a certain food provides compared to the number of calories it contains. For example, the amount of protein in one ounce of lean meat like chicken is about seven grams. You'll also get seven grams of protein from one ounce of sausage but the sausage contains more calories for that same amount of protein, therefore the chicken is more nutrient dense and the sausage is more calorie dense.

Some foods are referred to as empty calories, those are foods like soda, potato chips. Those types of foods provide very little nutritional benefit but they're high in calories from the sugars or fat that they contain so they are more calorie dense foods. That's the difference between nutrient density and calorie dense foods, you want to aim for foods that are nutrient dense.

Then finally, the E is for enough, I want you to eat enough. No matter the diet it should provide a sufficient amount of energy in the form of calories and adequate amounts of all nutrients required for a healthy diet. In other words, don't starve yourself. Diets that extremely restrict calories are not only difficult to maintain for any length of time but they can send your metabolic system into a tailspin. I think this is part of the reason why a lot of the diets at the bottom of the list came in so long because they were so severely restrictive, the Whole 30 is one of the examples of that.

As I wrap up here I have three points for you, three things I want you to remember. The first is that when it comes to weight loss almost all diets can work but many of them fail in the long run because it's not just about what you eat, it's about having a proper mindset and understanding. Not only of the right types of foods but of what your body needs and how your body responds to what you eat.

The second point, we need to get away from looking at diets strictly as a method of losing weight. Your diet is simply the way you eat. We all have a diet, we all have a way that we eat. There are different aspects to each of our diets but ultimately we can and should eat in such a way that promotes health. When done effectively, weight loss is simply a byproduct of healthy eating and healthy living.

Then the final point, everyone is different and therefore we all have different needs, not just in nutritional intake but in how we implement the changes to make our lives better. Some people despise brussel sprouts and beets, that some people is me, I do not like brussel sprouts or beets but there are many other vegetables that can provide the same nutritional benefits. Some people are vegetarians but there are ways to ensure that you get adequate levels of nutrients that are typically found in meats.

Some people are good with strict rules, guidance, and compliance but others need gradual change. Some of us struggle with maintaining healthy eating habits on our own. In this case, maybe a support system provided by some of the dietary approaches I mentioned in this episode may work for you. Again, all diets can work but you have to determine what works for you. Now, that's easier said than done. Well, a good approach is to take what you're doing now, because what's working for you, that's what working for you in some form or another even if it's only in the fact that you can sustain that.

Take what you're doing now and gradually improve where you can, small changes little by little over time. Use the principles I've laid out here, the same ones that are found in the freebie for this episode. Again, you can get that freebie, The Diet Planning Principles 2.0, at [tdfitness.net/019download](http://tdfitness.net/019download). Just focus on one change at a time and gradually add to your change efforts. I'll leave you with a quote, this is a quote by me though so ... Your diet is but a part, albeit a significant part, of an overall lifestyle that includes physical activity and mindset so your diet is extremely important but it's only a part of the equation.

I'll sign off here, I'll let you guys know that I will post the show notes for this episode at [tdfitness.net/019](http://tdfitness.net/019). If you like this content or think that it's helpful I ask that you please share it. Again, thank you all so much for tuning in. You have a blessed one. Coach T. Out.