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Diet Dangers for Cancer & Heart Patients, Q&A Part 3, Fad Diets

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It's one thing to experiment with fad diets when you're relatively healthy. But people dealing with health issues, especially cancer and heart problems, need to be extra careful.

In this third installment of our **Fad Diet Q&A series**, UVA nutritionists Carole Havrila and Katherine Basbaum tell us what diet elements could be dangerous and which could help.

Q. If someone has a heart condition or is in cancer treatment, are there certain diets to avoid?

Havrila: For cancer, any diet that would be restrictive in total calories or protein or both would likely worsen the nutritional status of a patient receiving cancer treatment and would not be recommended. This includes:

- **Fasts** (juice or otherwise) that are prolonged
- Severe **macrobiotic** diets that eliminate many foods and are very low in total calories
- Any diet that would include the use of high amounts of **dietary supplements**, as they may interfere with medicines patients use or even interfere with cancer treatments

Basbaum: For heart disease, I'd say stay away from the **Atkins-type diets**, the ones that encourage large amounts of high-fat animal protein like steak and bacon. These foods are high in sodium and saturated fats, two of the things we recommend eating in moderation when eating for heart health.

Q. What kind of diets aid prevention of heart issues and cancer?

Havrila: In terms of **cancer prevention**, plant-based diets rich in legumes and beans, fruits and vegetables and whole grains. Meat is a "condiment" and not the centerpiece of the meal. Diets for cancer prevention are controlled in calories to help patients maintain or achieve a healthy weight. Processed meats are eaten sparingly, if at all, and red meat is limited to 18 ounces a week.

Basbaum: For **heart health**, your diet should focus on high-quality lean protein (both plant and animal-based), low-fat dairy, whole grains, low sodium (less than 2000 mg/day), and having the majority of dietary fat coming from either polyunsaturated or monounsaturated fat sources, i.e. olive oil, canola, nuts, seeds, avocado.

Next up: *Detox, Gluten-Free, Vegan, Fad Diets Q&A Part 4*

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