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### Sleep, Belly Fat, and Making Weight-Loss Last: Q&A Part 5 Fad Diets

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In this final installment of our **Fad Diets Q&A series**, UVA nutritionists Carole Havrila and Katherine Basbaum explain how sleep and belly fat relate and give us their best advice for sticking to a diet plan.

#### Q: Tell me about how sleep and belly fat relate to weight-loss.

**Havrila:** There is science that validates that elevated cortisol levels (a stress hormone) happen when we lack enough sleep or are consistently stressed out. While these states are correlated with higher cortisol levels and more belly fat, the only way to get that off is to care for the whole body. You must reduce calories and exercise to lose total body weight.

**Basbaum:** The stomach or abdominal area is indeed one of the more dangerous places on the body to carry excess weight: As fat accumulates and "pads" the spaces between the abdominal organs ("visceral fat"), you have increased risk of metabolic disturbances, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

Regarding lack of sleep, that can indeed lead to weight gain; there are specific hunger and satiety hormones (ghrelin and leptin) that can get thrown off if you're consistently not getting a good night's sleep. This means that not only will you be likely to consume more calories throughout the day, you will also have more trouble burning them off.

#### Q. Best tips for sticking to a diet or weight-loss plan?

**Havrila:** Accountability is a very powerful thing, so if you are really worried you will gain weight then keep a daily log of what you are eating/drinking (you can do this online with apps like MyFitnessPal or Sparkpeople). These keep a tally of your calories and can be helpful to keep you on track when you are considering that extra cookie.

#### Fad Diets: Final Thoughts

Fad diet advertisements often distort key facts about the body in order to sell their products.

Here are **5 things** from this series to remember the next time you're tempted to believe otherwise:

1. Detox-diets, cleanses and any plan that removes a food group entirely could put you at risk of missing nutrients you need. If you have health issues, fasts and cleanses can even hurt you.
2. Diets that focus on eating large amounts of saturated fat found in many meats, butter, full-fat dairy, etc., can be bad for your heart, and that hurts your overall health.
3. Extreme diets are often so hard they backfire.
4. You don't need to cleanse; your body detoxifies itself.
5. Every weight-loss plan requires diet and exercise to be successful.



Healthy foods and a balanced diet still rank as the best way to lose weight and stay fit.

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Was this series helpful? What surprised you? What diet will you try — or try to avoid — next?

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