

TIPS TO LIVE BY

4 Key Nutrition Trends for 2024 & Whether They Live Up to the Hype

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If you're ever curious about the latest nutrition trends, all you have to do is hop online. From social media influencers to recipe websites to online communities, the Internet is always abuzz with the latest dietary crazes.

But which of these can you truly trust to be healthy?

"Nutrition trends gaining steam in 2024 include eating patterns to support emotional wellness and brain health, with a focus on fresh foods," says Monica Bearden, a registered dietitian at Houston Methodist. "Protein, fiber and magnesium intake are also top of mind, and new beverages on the market promoting digestive health and immune support are bringing pre- and probiotics to the forefront."

She adds that intermittent fasting is a diet she's often asked about these days.

"It's currently very popular, with several different fasting schedules floating around social media," says Bearden.

With information coming from all angles — and all manner of sources — you're not alone if you're unsure what your nutrition focus should be. We break down the four hottest dietary crazes, and Bearden gives her recommendations

1. Intermittent fasting for brain health and emotional wellness

Our first nutrition trend is one of today's most popular diets: intermittent fasting. Its potential effect on weight loss is most obvious, but advocates cite research that it also can help improve mental clarity, focus, mood and emotional resilience.

Dietitian's take:

Intermittent fasting actually can negatively affect brain function and emotional well-being.

"The daytime fasting practices that are currently popular can actually leave a person feeling drained — without energy and unable to concentrate or think," says Bearden. "Additionally, nutrient deficiencies result from not eating enough food and not having enough variety in the foods you eat. Both are potential downsides of intermittent fasting, and these deficiencies can impact emotional wellness, as well as brain function and health."

What you need to know:

Eating **breakfast** and meals at regular intervals throughout the day gives you the fuel you need to feel good and think clearly.

"Well-balanced meals comprised of lean protein, carbohydrates and healthy fats, along with foods rich in vitamins and minerals, are essential for producing adequate levels of the hormones that benefit your emotional health and protect your brain," explains Bearden.

Recommendation:

If you find yourself feeling down or without energy, your current fasting regimen may not be working for you. Bearden recommends trying either the **Mediterranean**, DASH or MIND diet instead.

Based on the eating patterns of people who live in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, the Mediterranean diet prioritizes plants over meat and animal products. It's high in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds and olive oil.

The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet is similar, with a big emphasis on reducing sodium intake. Many experts rank these as two of the healthiest options, both of which are really more of an eating pattern than a diet.

The MIND (Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay) diet essentially combines the Mediterranean and DASH diets, but with an emphasis on the foods that benefit brain health. It prioritizes antioxidant-rich berries over other types of fruits, for instance.

"All of these diets are rich in brain-building nutrients, with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables as well as lean proteins and healthy fats," explains Bearden. "And the variety of foods included in these diets fuels the whole body so that you feel energized and well."

Another perk of following one of these eating patterns is that most people will also lose weight, so long as they're eating they're eating the right amounts of foods for their daily activity level.

And if you still want to take advantage of the benefits of fasting, Bearden has another tip:

"The easiest way to fast is to actually tie it to your natural circadian rhythm," explains Bearden. "Instead of fasting during the day when you need energy, adjust your fasting to a 12-15 hour overnight fast. Then, starting with breakfast, eat at regular intervals every three to four hours to help maintain your energy levels and keep yourself feeling well throughout the day."

2. High-protein intake to help lose weight

Next up, protein. With many people aiming to lose weight in 2024, protein takes center stage. High-protein diets often are touted for their potential to aid in weight loss and weight management.

Dietitian's take:

"Decreasing high energy carbs for lean protein typically results in decreased calorie intake, which aids weight loss," says Bearden. "Protein also satisfies hunger and helps maintains muscle mass, both of which can help with losing weight. However, fruits and vegetables (carbohydrates) are still important — even when increasing protein intake."

What else you need to know:

"If you are exercising and wanting to lose weight, aim to get 1.2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight," recommends Bearden. "This is in addition to eating plenty of fiber-rich, nutritious carbohydrates, such as legumes, fruits and vegetables."

That translates to 82 grams of protein per day for a person weighing 150 pounds, for example.

(Related: [How to Get Enough Protein](#))

Recommendation:

If you are decreasing carbohydrates for weight loss purposes, be sure to replace some of your usual starchy carbs (rice, pasta, white bread) with lean protein, while still maintaining a high-fruit, high-vegetable intake. (Related: [Are Simple Carbs Always Bad? Are Complex Carbs Always Better?](#))

"Including non-fat dairy provides muscle and bone-building protein and nutrients, as well as nutritious carbohydrates," adds Bearden.

3. Fiber, prebiotics and probiotics for better gut health

Gut health is tied not only to a functioning digestive system, but also immune function and cardiovascular health.

"And potentially even weight loss, based on newer research," adds Bearden.

But what's the best way to support a healthy gut microbiome, the collection of beneficial microbes living in your digestive tract?

Dietitian's take:

"Science supports the benefit of having an abundance of healthy bacteria in the gut," says Bearden. "For instance, studies show that people who are leaner have a diverse, rich gut microbiome."

Fiber, prebiotics and probiotics are all important for maintaining good gut health.

But Bearden adds, "Rather than relying on supplements or other wellness products, the preferred way to get fiber, prebiotics and probiotics is to eat plenty of the right foods."

What else you need to know:

Getting plenty of fiber — 25 grams per day for women, 38 grams per day for men — is easy when eating a high plant-based diet rich in fruits, vegetables and legumes. (Related: [How to Get More Fiber In Your Diet](#))

"These plant-based foods are also considered prebiotics," explains. "This means that they feed the healthy bacteria in the gut, helping them thrive over other bacteria. The actual bacteria are the probiotics, and they can naturally be found in fermented dairy beverages and yogurt."

Probiotics are also available as supplement pills, but fermented dairy products contain the most viable gut-friendly bacteria, Bearden notes.

Recommendation:

"To help promote good gut health, aim to eat five to 10 different plant-based foods a day — such as fresh fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts and seeds," says Bearden. "If you still want to add a probiotic to your daily regimen, look for a refrigerated fermented dairy source, like kefir or yogurt."

4. Magnesium supplementation for overall health

Magnesium is taking center stage in 2024, touted as something of a cure-all mineral. Articles and posts promote magnesium supplements as a way to help with ... well, almost everything — blood pressure, muscle contractions, pre-menstrual syndrome (PMS), bone health, immune function, migraine relief, emotional well-being, energy and even sleep.

Dietitian's take:

"Even though magnesium is found in a variety of foods, the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey of 2013-2016 found that almost half of Americans aren't getting enough of it from their diet," says Bearden. "Additionally, certain illnesses and medications can affect magnesium absorption or increase loss of it. This does not mean, however, that we should all run out and grab magnesium supplements."

What else you need to know:

Magnesium, similar to other minerals, is important for overall health.

"Involved in over 300 enzymatic reactions in the body and the mineral used to build bones and facilitate nerve signaling, it is no wonder that **magnesium** has many health benefits attributed to it," says Bearden.

But too much magnesium isn't a good thing, either. It can interfere with other minerals in the body, and magnesium toxicity can be fatal. The recommended daily allowance (RDA) for magnesium ranges from 320 to 360 milligrams for women and 410 to 420 mg for men.

Recommendation:

"Eating a healthy diet — such as a Mediterranean, DASH or MIND diet — ensures you are getting enough magnesium, as well as other micronutrients," says Bearden. "In fact, getting nutrients, vitamins and minerals from foods, versus supplements, helps ensure we don't overdo it."

Foods containing magnesium include:

- Nuts
- Seeds
- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Dairy
- Animal proteins

"As long as you are eating a balanced diet with enough food, you should be getting enough magnesium to reap its overall health benefits," adds Bearden.

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