



## Other Diets

*This answer is brought to you by many of the Australian nutrition professionals who regularly contribute to the Nutritionists Network ('Nut-Net'), a nutrition email discussion group.*

### **POTATOES NOT PROZAC**

*Kathleen Desmaisons is the author of the book 'Potatoes Not Prozac'. The basis of her plan is also available on-line at: <http://www.radiantrecovery.com>*

Dr Desmaisons believes that many people suffer from an undiagnosed 'sugar sensitivity'. If you are a 'sufferer', she promises that following her plan will 'change your blood chemistry and improve your neurotransmitter function'. (Neurotransmitters are biochemicals in the brain that influence all aspects of mental function, including the ability to think clearly, feelings of alertness or fatigue, and mood).

Her program involves seven key steps. These are presented (with comments on their value) below:

1. Keeping a food journal: The journal aims to set a baseline, so that you can determine what you eat and how you feel as a result of eating that food or meal. This seems to be a sensible practice and should at least alert you to any inappropriate practices (such as too many fatty snacks between meals, for example).
2. Eating three meals a day at regular intervals: Dr Desmaisons doesn't actually prohibit any food that you previously ate--she advises that you simply have that food during a meal rather than between meals.

In fact, there is little reason for believing that simply transferring food intake to another time will have any beneficial effect on weight control. To reduce weight--and maintain that weight loss--a conscious effort must be made to modify the types and quantities of foods eaten, not simply the timing of food intake.

3. Taking vitamins as recommended (by Dr Desmaisons): This advice (which contains a misconception on her part--one of the 'vitamins' she advocates is in fact the mineral zinc) is not consistent with current orthodox nutrition advice. If you are eating a nutritious, varied diet there is no need for extra vitamins unless these are prescribed by your doctor or dietitian.

4. Eating a recommended amount of protein at each meal: This belief is based largely on a finding that the quantity of a 'calming' neurotransmitter in the brains of rats may have been increased by feeding the rats protein. She draws a very long bow by translating that unconfirmed conclusion into the idea that people need to eat a specified quantity of protein at every meal to 'remain calm'. Sugars and fruits are the only common foods that do not provide at least some protein. By eating a normal mixed diet you will be obtaining some protein at each meal, anyway.

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5. Adjusting carbohydrate intake to include more complex carbohydrate foods: Dr Desmason appropriately advocates eating more 'complex carbohydrate' foods (such as bread, rice, pasta and potatoes) and fruits and vegetables. However, she implies that complex carbohydrates are nearly always digested and absorbed more slowly than 'simple' carbohydrates (essentially sugars). She is evidently unaware that this belief has been shown to be incorrect.

6. Reducing or eliminating sugars (including alcohol): The need for eliminating sugar is not supported by the scientific evidence. Eating only a moderate amount of sugars and foods containing sugars is entirely appropriate, but there is no need to 'eliminate' sugar from the diet.

It is also true that, far from being harmful to health, drinking small quantities of alcohol is associated with health benefits. This does not mean that a non-drinker should be encouraged to drink alcohol. Rather, if you already drink, you are advised to limit your intake.

7. Creating a plan for maintenance: This seems a sensible approach. It is based on the need to plan for the situation that may arise whereby you 'stray' from your new, healthy diet/lifestyle. Deciding beforehand whether or not you have really "failed" because you ate one piece of cake is appropriate (provided that you plan to answer that question with a resounding "NO!"). Having a 'contingency plan' ready--for example, 'if I fail to lose one kilogram per month, I will set a more achievable target for my rate of weight loss'--is entirely appropriate.

Overall, this diet plan is largely based on the idea that sugar is bad, protein is good, with fat not really rating a mention. This is not a sound basis for determining an appropriate diet for life (or even over the short term, such as during a period of weight loss). Also lacking is any reference to the importance of being physically active.

In conclusion, despite containing some sensible suggestions, Potatoes Not Prozac cannot be recommended as being appropriate for either weight control in the short term, or for lifelong health and wellness.

### **THE NEW BEVERLEY HILLS DIET**

This diet is the brainchild of Judy Mazel. Ms. Mazel has no health or nutrition credentials. Her New Beverley Hills Diet is based on the belief that enzymes (chemicals that promote the biochemical reactions essential to life) 'activate' the human body. According to Ms Mazel, each major form of food contains the enzymes that allow that food to be digested in the intestine. For example, fruits are supposed to contain the enzymes needed by the body to allow those fruits to be broken down. These enzymes, she maintains, are not able to digest other forms of carbohydrate foods (or those that provide protein or fat).

This concept has no basis in scientific reality. The body--not the food we eat--produces the digestive enzymes we need to break food down. Enzymes present in foods will actually be broken down themselves by the body's digestive processes, so enzymes that were present in the food will not be absorbed into the body as complete enzymes, but as their digested constituents.

Ms Mazel has also come to the conclusion that being overweight (ie, having excess body fat) results from 'indigestion'. That is, when food is not properly digested, the undigested food is converted to fat and stored in the body. This belief runs counter to current nutrition knowledge (and also to 'common sense'). If food isn't digested, it CANNOT be absorbed from the intestine into the blood. Undigested food passes through the colon and is

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'egested', ie, passed out of the body in the form of faeces.

If her lack of understanding of nutrition did not lead to inappropriate suggestions for losing weight, Ms Mazel's advice would be only eccentric, rather than potentially harmful. But she uses her non-scientific approach to encourage inappropriate eating patterns. For example, she advocates eating a single food, and nothing but that food, for an entire day. Such an eating pattern will lead to monotony and poor nutrient intake. Humans need a wide variety of foods to obtain the huge range of essential nutrients and other health-promoting constituents of food (such as antioxidants) that promote optimal health.

Of equal concern is her lack of reference to the need for activity. Nutritionists today stress the importance of being physically active in achieving (and maintaining) appropriate body weight, and for health generally.

In conclusion, the New Beverley Hills Diet cannot be recommended for either short periods (eg, during weight loss) or as the lifelong diet.

### **EAT RIGHT FOR YOUR TYPE**

Dr Peter D'Adamo, a 'naturopathic physician', is the author of the best-seller 'Eat Right for Your Type'. Information on his dietary recommendations is also available through: <http://www.webworker.com/profiles/er4yt.html>

#### **Basis of the Eat Right For Your Type Diet**

Dr D'Adamo believes that nutritional requirements are determined by 'blood type'. One means of classifying blood type is the 'ABO' system, based on proteins that occur on the surface of red blood cells. It is these proteins that determine whether or not one person's blood is compatible with another's. This compatibility is of critical importance in determining who can safely donate blood to a patient who needs a transfusion. According to this system, people are either 'O', 'A', 'B' or 'AB'. Note that this is just one means (although an important one) of classifying blood groups.

Dr D'Adamo believes that the different blood types came into existence at different stages during human cultural development. Type O is claimed to be the 'original' blood type--the one that everyone had during the 'Paleolithic' era (ie, during what is commonly called the Stone Age). The Paleolithic diet is suspected by many nutritionists of being high in meat. It was also a time when few, if any, grain foods were available. Therefore, Dr D'Adamo advocates that Type O people eat a lot of meat, no wheat and little, if any, other grains. Because early people usually had to be very active (eg, through the need to hunt animals) he also believes that people with Type O should engage in vigorous aerobic exercise.

Dr D'Adamo believes that Type A blood group first appeared 15 000 - 25 000 years ago, in response to the practice (for the first time) of agriculture. As a result, he believes that Type A people should eat plenty of grains and other high-carbohydrate foods. Because agriculture does not involve a high level of aerobic exercise, he suggests that Type A people should engage only in 'light activity such as golf and yoga'.

Type B is thought (by Dr D'Adamo) to be even more recent, appearing 10 000 - 15 000 years ago as a result of migration and possible mutation of Type A. Type B people 'should have the most varied diet of all the blood types, including meat'. He also believes that Type B is 'the only blood type that does well with dairy products.' The forms of exercise that Dr D'Adamo suggests for Type B are 'moderate swimming or walking.'

The most recent blood group, according to Dr D'Adamo, is Type AB, which he states did not come into existence until ~1 000 years ago. People with the AB blood type can

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supposedly eat a reasonably varied diet (but evidently should not consume much in the way of dairy products) and should take part in 'calming exercises and relaxation techniques'.

### **How Strong is the Scientific Evidence in Support of These Claims?**

The author does not cite any research on Paleolithic diets in support of his beliefs. In his book he makes up his scenario from his own beliefs. His book may be interesting to read, but it has no scientific basis whatsoever. For example, the ABO blood grouping system is just one that is used to classify people according to different blood types. Dr D'Adamo does not appear to be aware of this, or of the fact that other primates have the ABO blood grouping system, but these species have not been through the various eras that Dr D'Adamo believes led to a dependence of people on particular foods. He even uses an incorrect estimate of the timing of the origin of agriculture: this occurred about 10 000 years ago, not the 15 000 - 25 000 years that he states.

Of more fundamental importance is his lack of knowledge of the most basic aspects of human physiology in relation to nutrition and activity. His belief that people can live healthy lives on only a limited range of foods (whether dictated by their blood type or by anything else that is unrelated to nutrition) is simply wrong. Most people in Australia have all the enzymes needed to break down a huge variety of foods. Some people (particularly those of non-European origin) may not be able to digest large quantities of milk after infancy, but this (and all other problems with food intolerance) is unrelated to blood type. Of equal concern is his advice that only people with a certain blood type should engage in vigorous physical activity. Being physically active is of the utmost importance to EVERYONE, regardless of blood type, (or, for that matter, regardless of hair colour, taste in music or anything else that is equally unrelated to our health and wellbeing!)

In summary, the Eat Right For Your Type diet has no basis in science, and no aspect of this diet can be recommended.

### **FIT FOR LIFE**

In their book 'Fit for Life', Harvey and Marilyn Diamond state that this is not a diet, but 'a way of eating that can be incorporated into your life-style as a way of life, not as a dogmatic regimen'. They also promise 'permanent results' for control of weight. In support of this, Harvey Diamond claims that he lost 50 pounds (23 kg) in one month, while Marilyn claims to have lost 20 pounds (9 kg) in six weeks, by adopting the approach described in their book.

#### **Basis of the Fit For Life Diet**

According to the Diamonds, eating more than one type of food ('food combining') at a meal is undesirable. For example, the book's food plan calls for eating only fruit in the morning and mostly vegetables during the rest of the day. Eating inappropriate combinations of foods will, they claim, lead to 'putrefaction' (that is, rotting) of the food in the intestine. The greatest mistake, they believe, comes from combining protein and carbohydrate foods such as meat with potatoes, eggs with toast, or bread with cheese. The statement is also made that if you eat while ill, the food will putrefy in your intestine. Fasting, they say, is a safe and valuable method of eliminating these putrefied foods from the intestine.

They also claim that eating refined sugars leads to putrefaction even when the sugars are not combined with other foods, because refining 'strips every vestige of life' from the sugar. On the other hand, fruit--being high in water content--can 'cleanse the body of toxins' (unless it is eaten at the end of a meal, in which case...you guessed it...putrefaction sets in yet again!)

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### **How Strong is the Scientific Evidence in Support of These Claims?**

There is no scientific evidence to support any of these claims. Their belief that refining sugar 'strips every vestige of life' from it begs the question 'is sugar alive?'. The answer is, of course, 'no'. Sugar is a non-living chemical, so refining sugar cannot strip it of life.

With regard to their advice not to combine foods, it is actually quite difficult to avoid combining protein with carbohydrate. The Diamonds seem to be unaware that the 'carbohydrate foods' bread, potatoes, rice spaghetti and legumes (foods such as beans, peas, soy products and lentils) also contain significant quantities of protein. Eating these foods on their own (which they regard as appropriate) constitutes the very act of 'food combining' that they seem to think will cause indigestion.

As pointed out previously in this FAQ, the human digestive system has the enzymes and other conditions necessary for digesting and absorbing an extremely wide range of foods, whether eaten in isolation or in combinations. Human beings are naturally 'omnivorous': we can eat grain foods, vegetables, fruits, meat, fish and dairy products (among many other foods) and thrive on a huge range of combinations of foods. The Diamonds belief that we cannot digest a combination of foods has no scientific validity whatsoever.

Furthermore, their own 'testimonials' (if correct) to the effectiveness of their teachings on weight loss indicate just how inappropriate their advice is. Weight loss of 23 kg in one month (claimed by Harvey Diamond) is 23 times the maximum safe rate recommended by Nutrition Australia. Although not quite as extreme, the 9 kg lost in six weeks by Marilyn Diamond is still many times the maximum recommended rate of weight loss.

In summary, Fit For Life has no basis in science and therefore cannot be recommended for either the short or long term.

### **THE LIVER CLEANSING DIET**

Sandra Cabot--an Australian doctor--became 'frustrated with the orthodox medical approaches' to treating disease that were available in the 1980s, and developed her own ideas. These ideas are presented in detail in her first book 'The Liver Cleansing Diet', and in a more recent publication 'The Healthy Liver and Bowel Book'.

Dr Cabot believes that 'the liver is the gateway to the body and takes the load of our precious immune system. It is certainly true that the liver is involved in many processes that impact on health, including detoxifying poisons such as alcohol, but to describe the liver as 'the gateway to the body' is perhaps an exaggeration. Proper functioning of all organs-- including the brain, heart, pancreas, stomach and kidneys, among others--and not just the liver, is essential for health and wellbeing.

Dr Cabot also teaches that 'excess weight, poor health and digestive disorders are often due to liver dysfunction. She states that the most common liver dysfunction is 'fatty liver'. There is little if any evidence to support her belief that excess weight is due to liver dysfunction. Orthodox nutritionists believe that excess weight results from an excess of food intake relative to energy expenditure, not from liver dysfunction.

Based on Dr Cabot's belief about the supreme importance of the liver, the Liver Cleansing Diet was developed as an eight-week eating plan to detoxify and reduce fat levels in the liver. The diet consists of a series of recipes that she provides (available only in her books). By following her diet, while also taking nutritional supplements and 'liver tonics' you will (she claims) experience: increased energy levels; detoxification and cleansing of the blood stream; reduction of inflammation and degenerative diseases; better immune function; more efficient fat metabolism; and weight control.

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Dr Cabot recommends this diet for 'the thousands of patients who suffer with overburdened immune systems, chronic fatigue, obesity, fatty livers and recurring blocked arteries.

The scientific evidence that particular foods will specifically target the liver and 'cleanse' it is virtually non-existent. Despite this, Dr Cabot manages to give mostly appropriate dietary advice, even though it may be inappropriately directed specifically at improving liver function. Consistent with current nutritional concepts, her diet is largely based on: high intakes of fruits and vegetables (although she inappropriately recommends eating only the raw forms of these); a wide range of protein sources including lean meat, fish, legumes, grains, nuts and seeds; minimising saturated fat consumption; and moderating sugar intake.

However, she neglects to stress the importance of physical activity (which is believed by orthodox nutritionists to be as important as diet in determining health outcome).

Her advice to take a wide range of nutritional supplements is not in touch with current nutritional thinking. Some supplements are considered to be potentially dangerous, and in any case, supplements are unlikely to be beneficial if your diet is based on a wide range of nutritious foods. Finally, there is little or no scientific evidence that 'liver tonics' will have beneficial effects specifically on the liver (or on any other organ).

As an alternative to using her recipes, Dr Cabot recommends following the 'Twelve Vital Principles' of her method. These are (with comments on their value):

1. 'Listen to your body': Dr Cabot provides good advice on eating to satisfy hunger, rather than simply because it is 'time to eat' (ie, the next meal period has arrived). If you feel that you should join others at the dining table for social reasons, even though you are not hungry, she suggests having a 'raw juice, piece of fruit, a small raw vegetable salad, or a glass of water'.

Although sound in theory, this may be difficult and socially inappropriate if everyone else is tucking into roast lamb with all the trimmings (or some other substantial meal). Dr Cabot doesn't address this all-too-common situation. In this case, it may be preferable to eat the same food as those around you, but restrict yourself to only small serves.

2. 'Drink at least eight to twelve glasses of filtered water daily': The advice that Australians should drink plenty of water is entirely appropriate. The quantity that needs to be consumed will vary considerably, depending on such matters as climate and physical activity (especially activity in the heat that leads to copious sweating). Her recommended rate of water consumption (8-12 glasses per day) would cover the hydration needs of most Australians. As alternatives to plain water, Dr Cabot recommends drinking some tea (especially green and herbal teas) and 'raw juices'. These are all suitable rehydrating fluids in general, but none is suitable as a 'sports drink'.

Filtering drinking water may be necessary in certain areas (where proper water treatment is not available, or has not been effective in removing agents of water-borne disease), but is unlikely to be needed in the vast majority of urban areas of Australia (and in most rural areas).

3. 'Avoid eating large amounts of sugar': This advice is consistent with the Australian Dietary Guideline to 'Eat only a moderate amount of sugars and foods containing added sugars'. The main problem with excessive sugar consumption is tooth decay. As a secondary problem, eating too much sugar can displace more nutritious foods from the

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diet. Dr Cabot is aware of these potential problems and addresses them appropriately.

4. 'Don't become obsessed with measuring calories' (kilojoules): This is excellent advice. Although excess energy (kilojoule) intake will lead to overweight, obsession with kilojoule intake can be counterproductive. It is also inappropriate to 'live on the bathroom scales'. Rather, following Dr Cabot's advice to eat high quality, nutritious meals and enjoy your food--without obsessing over kilojoule intake or changes in body weight-- may significantly reduce the risk of many diet-related conditions, including overweight.

5. 'Avoid foods that you may be allergic to': It would be hard to argue against avoiding anything that you may be allergic to! It is finding out what (if anything) you are allergic to that is sometimes difficult. If you suspect that you are allergic to a food (or more than one) but can't identify the offending food(s), it may be appropriate to ask your doctor for a referral to a dietitian who is experienced in the area of food allergy/ food intolerance.

6. 'Be aware of good intestinal hygiene': Dr Cabot teaches that toxins from the bowel can 'recirculate back to the liver...causing immune dysfunction and general poor health'. Although her explanation is unorthodox as to why fibre is beneficial, her advice--increase dietary fibre intake--is appropriate.

Her recommended sources of fibre (fruits and vegetables, grains, nuts) are suitable, but she appears to believe that it is inappropriate to eat cooked vegetables. This is incorrect, as explained under point 11 below.

7. 'Do not eat if you feel stressed or anxious': This advice is appropriate and possibly of great value, especially to those who have a tendency to overeat in response to stress. Eating to relieve stress is quite likely one of the contributors to the epidemic of overweight that is sweeping the Western world.

8. 'Check if organically grown fresh produce free of pesticides is available in your area': Although there may be valid arguments for organic foods from the viewpoint of sustainability, there is no convincing evidence that organic produce is nutritionally superior to conventional produce. Also, supermarket foods in Australia are regularly checked for such contaminants as pesticide residues, and the general Australian food supply has been consistently shown to be free of harmful levels of contaminants.

9. 'Obtain your protein from diverse sources (including legumes), not just from animal products such as meat, eggs, and fish': This is sound advice. Many Australians would do well to heed Dr Cabot on this issue and to eat more legumes (foods such as beans, peas, soy products and lentils). These are sources not only of protein, but also of other substances (called 'phytochemicals') that are strongly suspected of playing a part in promoting good health, particularly during later life.

10. 'Choose your breads and spreads wisely': Without providing any supporting evidence, Dr Cabot claims that additives in most commercial breads can cause 'bloating and irritable bowel syndrome'. She advises going to health food stores to buy bread that is free of artificial chemicals.

There is no need for the vast majority of Australians to avoid additives in bread (or in any other processed foods). All additives used in food in this country have been cleared by Australian health authorities as being not only safe to use, but also providing a technological benefit that cannot otherwise be obtained. Examples of benefits conferred by additives include extending shelf life, reducing the risk of food poisoning, improving texture or appearance). A small minority of people may have a sensitivity to a particular additive

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(or additives). See point 5 above for more information on this.

Dr Cabot also advises against using margarine or butter as spread. She states (correctly) that these spreads are not necessary and add to kilojoule intake. However, her suggestion for those who cannot go without a spread is to use alternatives such as avocado or humus. Her reasoning is that these provide 'natural essential fatty acids friendly to the liver'. She seems to be unaware that polyunsaturated and monounsaturated margarines also provide essential fatty acids; her alternatives are neither superior nor inferior to many commercially-available margarines.

11. 'Avoid constipation by eating plenty of raw fruits and vegetables': Dr Cabot recommends that 30-40% of our food intake should be in the form of raw fruits and vegetables because these provide 'living enzymes', vitamin C and phytochemicals. Although eating fresh fruits and vegetables is recommended by virtually all nutritionists, these fruits and vegetables don't all have to be raw. The concept of 'living enzymes' is spurious, as noted previously in the answer to this FAQ, and cooked vegetables are not only very nutritious, but also are often far more easily digested than the raw form. Eating raw potatoes, pumpkin, beans and broccoli (as just a few examples) would not appeal to many people, but the cooked forms are popular and easily digested. In Australia the orthodox recommendation is to eat five servings of vegetables (where a 'serving' is half a cup of vegetable--raw or cooked) and two servings of fruit each day.

12. 'Avoid excessive saturated or damaged fats'. Avoiding (or at least minimising) intake of saturated fat is wholly consistent with orthodox nutrition advice. Dr Cabot correctly identifies the major sources of saturated fat in the Australian diet as full-fat dairy products, fatty 'ruminant' meats (ie, the white fat found on cuts of beef and lamb, and sausages), deep fried takeaway foods, pastries, biscuits and cakes. Dr Cabot also recommends avoiding margarine. As noted in point 10 above, most table margarines contain little saturated fat; rather, many are sources of monounsaturated and/or polyunsaturated oils that may actually confer health benefits.

Dr Cabot recommends (appropriately) obtaining fats from nutritious sources such as vegetable and seed oils, fish and nuts.

In addition to her 'Twelve Vital Principles', Dr Cabot gives advice on how to reduce the risk of food poisoning: her recommendations on personal hygiene, kitchen hygiene, food preparation and storage methods are all appropriate.

She also recommends that people remain with their doctors, rather than simply adopt her diet as a replacement for orthodox medical treatment. This is very sound advice.

Overall, although the reasons Dr Cabot advances for eating particular foods are often not consistent with orthodox nutrition, most of her recommendations on diet are compatible with those of mainstream nutritionists. She is at odds with orthodox nutrition in advising eating only raw fruits and vegetables, taking 'liver tonics', avoiding commercial bread, consuming a wide range of nutritional supplements, and avoiding monounsaturated and polyunsaturated margarines. Dr Cabot also does not place nearly enough emphasis on the need to be physically active.

Despite containing some good points, there is too much inappropriate advice in the Liver Cleansing Diet--and too little regard for the value of physical activity--to recommend its adoption for either the short or long term.

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