

# Don't bite the bait

Health experts list the pitfalls of diet plans like keto, veganism and intermittent fasting, and recommend alternatives



**I Saadia S Dhalley**  
mirrorfeedback@timesgroup.com

TWEETS @MumbaiMirror

**M**any of us may never have been inside a dietician's office, but surely everyone knows the names of at least half a dozen diets. Keto, intermittent fasting, Atkins, paleo, veganism, the no-carb diet...the list is endless. We even know which celebrity is on what diet and, thanks to technology, can even get meal plans for ourselves with the push of a few buttons. According to India's Google search trends and health experts, the top three fad diets include the Keto diet, Intermittent Fasting, and the Vegan diet. But when your health is at stake, there's more to consider than what's on trend.

## Keto conundrum

Minimum carbohydrates, moderate amounts of protein, and loads of fats — this is essentially what is prescribed to those who opt for the Ketogenic diet. The idea is that this meal plan brings the body to ketosis, where the body burns fat as fuel rather than carbohydrates. "You definitely lose weight in the start, but in the long term, you will put everything back on," says dietician Deepshikha Agarwal. She explains that the diet affects the body's metabolism, slowing it down due to the lack of carbohydrates. "It also curbs your intake of micro-nutrients like zinc and selenium and body-building protein, and causes fluctuations in lipid profiles," says Agarwal.

Loss of muscle mass, irritability and brain fog, sometimes leading to accidents, are frequently reported by those on this diet, adds nutritionist Niti Desai. "As are headaches, constipation, and hair fall," she says.

The keto diet is also not advisable for patients on insulin medication or medication for hypoglycaemia. "It cuts down your carbohydrate intake to 50 grams a day. This lowers blood sugar dramatically, making it unsuitable for Type 1 diabetes. The borderline diabetic, or type 2 moderate, may, however, benefit," she says.

Elevated lipid profile level is another problem. "While non-vegetarians can have steak, ham and other meats, vegetarians don't have food sources that meet similar requirements," says Desai. "Dal, a

major protein source for vegetarians, is 65 per cent carbs. This means that vegetarians on the diet must consume more butter, ghee and avocado to compensate," she adds. Additionally, the diet means switching to rotis made of almond or flaxseed flour — again, a lot of fat. "While proponents of keto argue that all this is good fat, cholesterol is affected by the total amount of fat," says Desai. Given the cost of ingredients — on average, one would spend some Rs 15,000 every two weeks — it's not financially sustainable either.

## Beginner's diet

**BREAKFAST:** Two egg whites with two multigrain toasts/one chapatti; or one cup millet/oats upma with a cup of skimmed milk

**MIDMORNING:** Fruit

**LUNCH:** Two multigrain chapattis with one cup of vegetable and one cup dal/curd

**EVENING:** Sprouts salad/tomato omelette/a handful of nuts

**DINNER:** A bowl of soup, one chapatti, one cup of vegetables and one cup of dal (or a serving of non-veg) and salad

— Niti Desai, nutritionist

known as the Dixit Diet after Dr Jagannath Dixit, who has popularised it here — requires that people keep a 12-hour, 14-hour, 16-hour, or even an 18-hour fast. In the interim, they have two meals. "You can eat whatever you want in those two meals, which makes it convenient," says Desai. It also suits those not in the habit of eating breakfast. However, there isn't enough scientific evidence to support intermittent fasting. "Data from the National Weight Control Registry in the United States shows that introducing breakfast in a diet helps sustain weight loss. When you've missed the first meal of the day, you are going to feel hungrier and eat more later, making the overall calorie intake go up," Desai shares.

According to gastroenterologist Dr Philip Abraham, who is with Hinduja Hospital, the regimen defies the body's physiology. "We'd never get hunger pangs on time if fasting was healthy for the body," he says.

