

Pre-20th-century diets

In [Calories & Corsets: a History of Dieting over 2,000 years](#), Louise Foxcroft shows that worrying about our food habits, and trying to change them, isn't a modern phenomenon. "Hippocrates understood that the underlying principles of health were food and exercise," she writes. From early Christian asceticism to the 1558 "bestseller" *The Art of Living Long*, [Lord Byron's "fad diet of potatoes flattened and drenched in vinegar"](#) and the French physician Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's low-carb diet in the 19th century, the desire to lose weight has been a constant. "One of the earliest low-carbohydrate diets to reach a major audience," Foxcroft points out, was published by William Banting, an undertaker, in 1863. "It soon became so well-known that "Banting" – as in ["I am Banting"](#) – became a synonym for dieting in the UK and America well into the 1920s."

Fletcherism, early 1900s

At the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, Horace Fletcher, an American entrepreneur, gained the nickname [the Great Masticator](#). His diet, which Foxton called a "chewing craze", involved eating as much as you liked, but each mouthful had to be chewed a minimum of 100 times (the idea being that the food would become liquid, and weight gain could not result from undigested food).

Calorie counting, 1920s

The fashion for thin, boyish figures for women took hold in the 1920s, and so did fad diets, such as the cigarette diet (one Lucky Strike advert read ["reach for a Lucky instead of a sweet"](#)). Numerous products, such as diet pills, chewing gum, laxatives and contraptions made outlandish fat-reducing claims. But the idea of counting the number of calories in food took off after [Doctor Lulu Hunt Peters](#) published [Diet & Health: With Key to the Calories](#), in 1918. It sold millions of copies throughout the 1920s, becoming the first diet bestseller. She urged women to view food as calories, and not to consume more than 1,200 a day.

Hay diet, 1930s

The [diet established by William Hay](#), an American doctor, became one of the most famous early fad diets. It was based on Hay's idea that food was either protein, starch or neutral – protein and starch, he believed, should not be eaten in the same meal. Famous followers included Henry Ford.

[Cabbage soup diet](#), 1950s

The creator is unknown, but its popularity has continued to the present day, even though it appears to be nothing more than a recipe for flatulence. Usually a seven-day diet plan, consisting of mainly cabbage soup, supplemented with fruit and vegetables and a small amount of meat. Other soup diets have become popular in the decades since, such as the watercress soup diet.

The Atkins diet, 1972

Robert Atkins devised the diet based on his own weight-loss experiments, and by the late 1960s it was gaining attention. In 1972 he published *Dr Atkins' Diet Revolution*, which would go on to sell tens of millions of copies. Thirty years later, his follow-up book, *New Diet Revolution* (2002), made the Atkins diet more popular than ever – it was made more famous by the number of celebrities supposedly on it.

The Beverly Hills diet, 1981

The book, published in 1981, showed people how to follow a highly restrictive six-week food-combining regimen and turned its author, [Judy Mazel](#), into a Hollywood diet "guru". Mazel, clearly inspired by William Hay, believed that the order in which we ate food was the main problem, "confusing" the enzymes in our bodies that digest the food and leading to weight gain. She advocated the eating of rather a lot of "fat-burning" pineapple. For the first 10 days of the diet, only fruit was permitted; gradually other foods were introduced, but protein and carbohydrates were eaten separately. It sold more than a million copies and attracted celebrity fans including Linda Gray and Liza Minnelli.

Blood Type diet, 1997

In *Eat Right for Your Type*, [Peter D'Adamo](#), a naturopath, claimed that people should eat foods compatible with their blood type. Under his regimen, those with the O blood group, for instance, should follow a higher-protein/lower-carbohydrate diet, while those in the A group should be mainly vegetarian. He claims his diet will "lead you back to the essential truths that live in every cell of your body and link you to your historical, evolutionary ancestry".

The Dukan diet, 2000s

A French GP, [Pierre Dukan](#), developed his diet in the 1970s as a way of treating obese patients. But it was only in 2000, when he published his book in France (it was published in the UK in 2010), that the Dukan diet took off, selling around eight million copies to date. Like the Atkins diet, it involves four stages of weight loss and "stabilisation", with the final stage being a diet for life, including eating protein only one day a week.

The fasting diet, 2012

Fasting, sometimes known as the [5:2 diet](#) (eat normally for five days; restrict calories to 500 for women, and 600 for men, on two non-consecutive days), is the current diet trend – though its supporters would describe it as advice for life rather than a fad diet – and there are claims it can reduce the risk of cancer and heart disease. In the UK, the idea gained traction after Dr Michael Mosley took part in a [BBC2 Horizon documentary](#) about the health benefits of fasting in 2012, [then published a book on the subject](#). Another book, [The 2 Day Diet](#), also advocating two low-calorie days per week, has just been published. Written by Dr Michelle Harvie, a dietitian, and

Tony Howell, a professor of oncology at Manchester University, and based on their research, it gives weight to the 5:2 diet.