

The Cabbage Soup Diet

What It Is

Versions of this very restrictive diet have been buzzing through fax machines and circulating around water coolers for years. A few books have documented different variations of this simple, anonymously written diet plan, which surprisingly has survived the test of time.

The Cabbage Soup Diet plan is not in any way individualized. There are no recommendations about exercise, no behavioral tips, no advice on changing bad habits -- just a strict list of what to eat each day of the week. The Cabbage Soup Diet plan promises a 10-pound weight loss in one week, and dieters are restricted to one week at a time on the plan. If they want to lose more, they are advised to wait awhile before commencing another week on this super-low-calorie diet.



What You Can Eat

The 7-day Cabbage Soup Diet plan promises all you can eat -- as long as you stick to the small list of allowed foods on alternate days, along with two daily bowls of fat-free cabbage soup. Other specific foods that must be eaten include fruit, vegetables, skim milk, and meat. Dieters are also advised to drink plenty of water and avoid alcohol.

Here's a sample Cabbage Soup Diet plan:

Day 1: Cabbage soup and all the fruit you want except bananas. Drink unsweetened tea, black coffee, cranberry juice, or water.

Day 2: Cabbage soup, all the low-calorie vegetables you want (except beans, peas, or corn), and a baked potato with butter.

Day 3: Cabbage soup and a mixture of the above fruit and vegetables.

Day 4: Cabbage soup, up to eight bananas, and two glasses of skim milk.

Day 5: Cabbage soup, up to 20 ounces of beef, chicken or fish, up to six fresh tomatoes, and at least 6-8 glasses of water.

Day 6: Cabbage soup, up to 3 beef steaks, and unlimited vegetables.

Day 7: Cabbage soup, up to 2 cups of brown rice, unsweetened fruit juices, and unlimited vegetables.

The recipe for the cabbage soup varies slightly among different versions of the diet. But it basically includes cabbage and assorted low-calorie vegetables such as onions and tomatoes, and is flavored with onion soup mix, bouillon, and tomato juice.

How It Works

The Cabbage Soup Diet is essentially a modified fast, containing so few calories that dieters will lose weight rapidly during the weeklong regimen. There is nothing magical about cabbage or cabbage soup that fosters weight loss. It's the low-calorie nature of the diet plan that does the trick.

The diet makes no scientific claims on how it works. While several versions exist, common to all is the premise that if you eat lots of cabbage soup when you're hungry, it will keep you satisfied enough to sustain this very low-calorie diet for a week.

Dieters may very well lose the promised 10-15 pounds, but the problem is that most of the weight lost will be primarily from fluids, not fat, and will return once the dieter resumes eating normally.

Factor in the monotony of eating virtually the same foods every day for a week, and dieters may tend to eat even fewer than the already dangerously low (approximately 800-1,050) calories per day.

Experts agree that any diet under 1,200 calories per day is unsafe unless you're under a doctor's care. It's almost impossible to get all the nutrients you need and satisfy hunger in so few calories. A bottomless bowl of cabbage soup, along with a restricted list of allowed foods, provides a mere skeleton of the nourishment your body needs each day.

Food for Thought

You will lose weight on the Cabbage Soup Diet, but you can plan on seeing those pounds return. This diet plan is nothing more than a quick fix that does nothing to help change the behaviors that lead to weight gain.