

The Cookie Diet

What It Is

What if eating cookies and not being hungry was part of your diet plan? The Cookie Diet uses cookies to entice dieters into easy weight loss. After all, what could be more appealing than losing weight while indulging in one of our favorite treats?

But these are not your grandmother's cookies. Instead they're designed to be meal replacements -- made with fiber, protein, and other ingredients intended to keep you full. They contain no drugs or secret ingredients, other than amino acids (the building blocks of protein) and fiber that act to suppress hunger.

Several cookie diet plans exist; the most popular are the Hollywood Cookie Diet, the Smart for Life diet, and Dr. Siegal's Cookie Diet. Sanford Siegal, MD, a Miami obesity physician who developed a cookie formula in 1975 to help his patients lose weight, is considered the originator of the cookie diet concept.

Some of the cookie diets are designed for people to follow on their own with some online guidance; others are done under medical supervision.

The Cookie Diet: How it Works

On the Cookie Diet, there are no decisions about what to eat except which flavor cookie to eat, and what to have for dinner. It's a relatively mindless diet. The cookies contain select amino acids thought to suppress hunger, fiber, and other ingredients that digest slowly to help keep you feeling full. Eating 4-6 of the cookies a day will give you somewhere around 500 calories.

Dinners are simple: Lean protein and veggies, or a light frozen dinner and a salad. The dinners range from a low of 300 to a high of about 1,000 calories each, meaning the diet has a grand total of 800-1,500 calories per day.

Anyone following an 800-calorie per day plan is sure to lose weight, but medical supervision is recommended for people following very low-calorie diets (less than 1,200 per day), as they are likely to be deficient in nutrients. Most of the very low-calorie cookie diet plans recommend a daily multivitamin to fill in the nutritional gaps.

The Cookie Diet: What You Can Eat

The cookies that replace breakfast, lunch, and snacks range from 90-150 calories each. They come in a variety of flavors, including chocolate, banana, blueberry, oatmeal, and coconut. The cookies are convenient, portable, and don't need refrigeration.

On Siegal's medically supervised cookie diet, you have one meal for dinner, consisting of 4-6 ounces of lean protein with steamed veggies or raw veggies. The meal contributes about 300 calories. Eight daily glasses of no-calorie coffee, tea, water, or other beverages are allowed, but no alcohol, sweets, fruits, dairy, or other foods are recommended.



Dieters using the online cookie diet plans without medical supervision are directed to eat about 500 calories worth of cookies each day, plus a dinner made up of "sensible foods." This approach controls daytime calories, but dinner could be a calorie disaster unless it is chosen wisely.

The Cookie Diet: What the Experts Say

American Dietetic Association spokeswoman Dee Sandquist, MS, RD, says the Cookie Diet is another version of the meal replacement plan, known to be an effective option for some.

"For lots of people, decisions about meals are tough, whether at home or eating out, and when you can drink a shake or, eat a cookie or a bar instead of a meal, it simplifies it and helps some dieters stay in control," she says.

She emphasizes the importance of making wise food choices when following the Cookie Diet, and recommends that dieters include lean protein, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats, and low-fat dairy in the dinner meal, even if it ends up being more than 300 calories.

As for the very low-calorie monitored Cookie Diet plans, critics say 800 calories is below the recommended level for safe and effective weight loss. They say the 800-calorie cookie diet is lacking in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, dairy, and fiber, all of which should be a part of any healthy weight loss plan.

You should check with a registered dietitian before you embark on any weight loss plan, especially one that calls for eating less than 1,200 calories a day.

Another weakness in the Cookie Diet, experts say, is the lack of an exercise plan. Experts recommend that physical activity be a regular part of everyone's life.

"Physical activity is essential to build and maintain lean muscle, and is an integral part of an overall healthy lifestyle that needs to be part of the Cookie Diet or any other weight loss plan," Sandquist says.

The Cookie Diet: Food for Thought

Although the idea of a cookie for a meal sounds like a childhood dream, the truth is that it could get monotonous eating cookies every day. And without regular physical activity and guidance to help you make long-term lifestyle changes, lost weight may creep back.

While you'll most likely lose weight quickly on an 800-calorie-a-day plan, the cookie diets lack a transitional plan to help dieters get back to eating more normally and to maintain the lost weight.

Adapted from a WebMD article written by Kathleen M. Zelman, MPH, RD, LD