

# SELF

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# the real genius of FAD DIETS

These crazy plans—and we agree many are crazy—actually offer mental tricks that can help you stick to a healthy diet. Skip the starvation, but steal their insights.

**T**empted to try a new get-slim-quick scheme? There's a good reason. "Fad diets are designed to connect with our emotions in ways that healthy ones don't," says Brian Wansink, Ph.D., director of the Cornell Food and Brand Lab. They tap into human nature and what inspires us. Use that motivation-boosting power to supercharge your own (sane) eating plan.

## 1 Start strong.

Diets that are low-carb and high-protein often start with an "induction" period when you swear off refined carbs or eliminate almost everything except lean protein. It's hard-core, but that's part of the point: Pain equals pride. "A drastic change makes you feel tougher, and you believe you'll be successful because you survived it," say SELF contributing experts Stephanie Clarke, R.D., and Willow Jarosh, R.D. Kick off your own era of healthy eating with a big dietary change, too: Pick your biggest food pitfall (let's say sugar—just a guess!) and eliminate it for a few weeks, Clarke and Jarosh suggest. You'll be so proud that you'll be motivated to stick to the other parts of your diet. Just be sure to make a mental note that the transition was tough. "That way, you avoid falling back into old habits, because you won't want to put yourself through that ordeal again," they say.

## 2 Narrow your options.

Limiting your diet to, say, grapefruit and bison helps take the guesswork out of eating. "The more options you have, the more likely you are to make a bad choice," says Jennifer Taitz, Psy.D., a psychologist in New York City. Not only that, when more options are available, you're prone to gorge. Wansink conducted a study giving people free rein over a bowl of M&M's. When the bowl had 10 colors of candy, people ate 43 percent more than when there were 7. "Variety, or even a perception of it, can increase consumption," he explains. Try plotting out four or five healthy options for each meal and rotate among them, nixing what's not on the plan, Taitz suggests. Continue until you get sick of them, then refresh your menu with a new set of choices.

## 3 Throw some money at it.

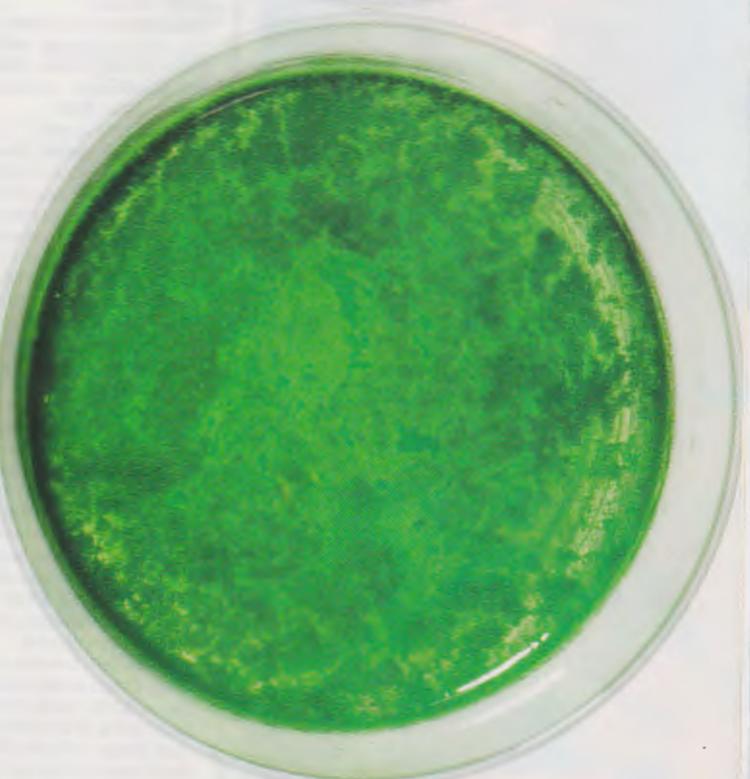
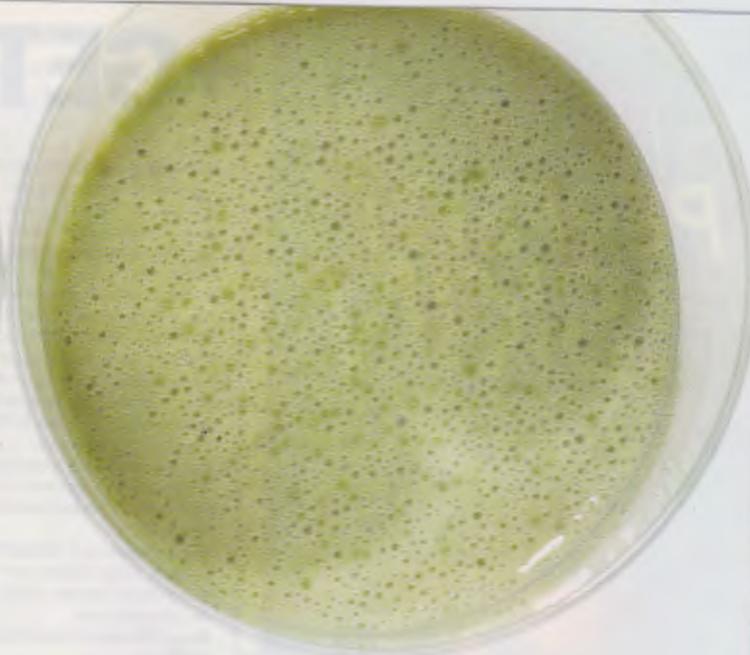
Fad diets often involve purchases—elixirs, apps, books, seminars. There's a mind game at work: Spending cues you to make an emotional investment. And since you ponied up the cash, you feel obligated to stick to the plan. "Fear of wasting money can override a short-term food craving," Taitz says. So do a little splurging yourself. Relish those fancy goji berries (a SELF superfood!) and get that Porsche-grade smoothie blender you've been coveting. Just eyeing them reminds you to make good on those investments and eat healthy all the time.

## 4 Be a trendsetter.

Fact is, fad diets are newswier than celebrity breakups, so if someone in your office is only eating raw food, everyone wants to know all about it. When your cube mate asks about your discipline, you get a little share-your-secret ego bump and it helps you stick to it, Wansink says. But any healthy, eye-catching new food does the trick. Try this: Bring a plate of DIY veggie sushi to work. (a) You'll instantly be office MVP, and (b) when everyone asks for the recipe, say it's part of your super-sane, no-more-lunch-sandwiches regimen. All those people who have been chugging kombucha for three days straight will be thrilled to chew food again. Instant followers!

## 5 Make it new.

We love novelty, and fad diets play into that. Starting a new meal plan can keep us engaged and excited. "When you adopt different behaviors, it automatically triggers a massive feeling of success," says Gary Wenk, Ph.D., a neuroscience and psychology professor at Ohio State University in Columbus. Strategies like reducing portions certainly work, but they can be a yawn. Instead, make a more fundamental change: If you're a takeout fiend, cook meals at home three nights a week, using a cookbook with exotic and healthy recipes, Clarke and Jarosh suggest. Even the tiniest thing can re-excite you, so get that new bento box lunch container. "Sometimes the best of faddish food is the pretty packaging," they say.



**MMM...LUNCH?**  
When you can suck  
yours down in 30  
seconds, something's  
not right.

