

New year, new diet

Among the New Year's resolutions worldwide, many people have pledged to find and stick with a healthy diet. But there's a lot more to it than just grabbing every "reduced fat" item off the grocery store shelf.

[Karen Whitehorn, MD](#), an OSF HealthCare internal medicine physician, hears questions all the time about diets. Her first question back is usually: what do you want out of your diet? Do you want to be healthy? Lose weight? Manage a medical condition? Sort through the details, and you'll find the best option.

Exploring the popular options

U.S. News and World Report recently consulted a panel of medical and nutrition experts to [rank the best diets](#). The Mediterranean diet topped the list. Dr. Whitehorn says this diet is based on the eating habits of people who live near the Mediterranean Sea. It's a plant-based diet, incorporating fruits, vegetables, whole grains, brown rice and seafood.

"The Mediterranean diet is actually pretty easy to follow. But you need to make sure you have the right food in your home," Dr. Whitehorn says. "It might be a little more difficult during the winter to get fresh fruits and vegetables. If you can't, frozen is OK. Canned is OK. But we recommend you rinse the canned food first to decrease some of the salt."

Number two on the U.S News list is a plan Dr. Whitehorn recommends often: dietary approaches to stop hypertension, or the DASH diet. It recommends foods that are low in sodium and high in magnesium and potassium.

Some people may incorporate fasting into their diet. Dr. Whitehorn says fasting, when done in consultation with a medical expert, can work. But she's hesitant to recommend it broadly.

"Our bodies need nutrients every couple hours. So to not eat anything for 12 hours can cause other problems," Dr. Whitehorn says. "If you're diabetic and don't eat for 12 hours, your blood sugar could drop too low. Then when you eat, it could go too high."

Avoid misinformation and fads

Watch out for fad diets on social media, Dr. Whitehorn says. Remember the saying: if it's too good to be true, it probably is.

"Fad diets are not consistent. They're not healthy. They don't provide you the nutrients you need. If it requires you to take a pill or drastically reduce your calories, it's not really a healthy diet. It can only be followed in the short term."

On the contrary, working out a diet plan with your health care provider has a better chance of achieving long term results.

“A healthy diet gives you the energy you need to do everyday activities,” Dr. Whitehorn says. “It has been shown to increase your life expectancy. And it helps prevent chronic medical problems like high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer and heart disease.”

Visit the [OSF HealthCare website](#) for healthy recipes.