

# LOSE A BUNCH

The Morning Banana Diet may be the cheapest, easiest ever. But does it work?



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BY ELOISE PARKER

Imagine a diet where you could eat whatever you wanted for lunch and dinner and lose weight without even hitting the gym. And it all costs less than a dollar a day. No joke. It's bananas.

The Morning Banana Diet is the latest fad diet to hit the U.S. It's already created a shortage of the fruit in Japan, where the weight-loss craze originated. It was devised by Japanese pharmacist Sumiko Watanabe for her husband, who lost 37 pounds on the plan, which he described as "stress free."

The plan is simple: Eat only fresh bananas for breakfast or brunch with sips of lukewarm water, enjoy a normal lunch, afternoon snack and dinner — no desserts — before 8 p.m. and be in bed before midnight. Exercise is optional.

A couple of days into trying the plan, I have to admit it's easy. Two bananas keep me full until lunch, which, according to the rules, can be anything as long as there's no dessert. Making the effort to eat before 8 and get to bed before midnight sounds more like common sense than a fad diet, but by day three I'm getting bored of eating only

bananas for breakfast — and the scales haven't moved.

Internet forums like Morningbanana.com wax lyrical on the supposed metabolism-boosting resistant starch found in slightly green bananas, and many repeat the story of a Japanese actress who lost 26 pounds on the diet.

Most people have only just begun the diet, and there's a curious lack of impressive first-person weight-loss stories posted, suggesting that the banana alone may not be the magic bullet for weight loss that it's touted to be.

"There's nothing magical about a banana," says Bonnie Taub-Dix, a New York-based dietitian and national spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association.

"It's high in fiber and a very rich fruit, so it's going to make you feel full, but instead of the morning banana diet, you could make it the morning yogurt diet, and you'd be getting a better blend of nutrients."

The biggest problem, says Taub-Dix, is the lack of clear calorie guidelines, plus instructions that include "exercise only if you want to" and "eat anything you want for lunch and dinner."

"It's not well-defined or scientifically based," she says. "Whenever you have a diet that says eat all you want, there's the possibility that people who are prone to over-eating will have problems."

And with anywhere from one to four bananas allowed for breakfast, there's even more scope for calorie confusion.

"Bananas can range anywhere from 60 calories to 180 depending on their size, and it's all about how many calories you eat at the end of the day," says Lisa Sasson, clinical associate professor of nutrition and food studies at NYU, who calls the metabolism-boosting claims of the diet "preposterous."

And while experts agree bananas are a wholesome source of carbs and potassium, eating too many can cause problems.

"The sugars in bananas adhere to your teeth more than other fruits, so eating them in the morning puts you at high risk of cavities," says Sasson.

"Bananas are also very constipating," says Taub-Dix. "You have to look at what 'cheap and easy' means because you pay a high price for improper eating."

Dietitians balk at the plan's green light to 'eat all you want.'

## PICKING FRUIT DIETS APART

The banana isn't the first fruit to start a craze. Nutritionist Lisa Sasson guides us through some of the fads.



**The Grapefruit Diet:** The premise is that the tart citrus has unique fat-burning properties, which are maximized by eating half a grapefruit before every meal.

"If all you had to do was eat a few grapefruits, we wouldn't have a weight-loss problem," scoffs Sasson. "Plus, certain medication like statins [used to lower cholesterol] can be interfered with by eating grapefruit."

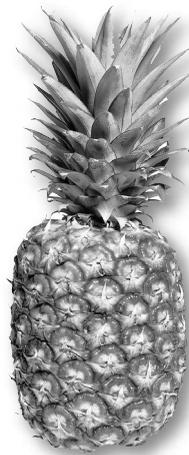


**The Coconut Diet:** Based on the notion that coconut oil is metabolized more efficiently than other fats, it suggests consuming two to three tablespoons of the oil daily.

"Coconut oil is a high-calorie saturated fat," explains Sasson. "It might not be as bad for your arteries as other fats, but the research is limited. If you eat too much fat, you'll simply gain weight."

**The Pineapple Diet:** The idea: Eat only sweet pineapple flesh for a limited time before reducing overall caloric intake to less than 1,000 calories per day.

"Pineapples are nutritious, but very high-sugar. Consuming large amounts is an especially bad idea for a borderline diabetic," warns Sasson. "As a tool for weight loss, it's absolutely unfounded."



**The Apple Cleanse:** It's apples only until dinnertime for a few days to "cleanse" your digestive system and jump-start weight loss on this short-term plan.

"You eat apples and don't have to think," shrugs Sasson. "It could work for a little bit, but how many apples can you eat before you're not going to want to look at another apple? It doesn't promote good long-term eating habits."



**The Lemon Diet:** A celebrity favorite, "the Master Cleanse" involves consuming nothing but an eye-watering "lemonade" made with fresh-squeezed lemon juice, maple syrup and cayenne pepper for a few days.

"Diets that promote quick weight loss are super-dangerous, lacking essential vitamins and minerals, and make you more vulnerable to gaining weight," says Sasson. "Lemons are very healthy, but the whole idea of fasting isn't."

E.P.