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What Makes a Diet Easy to Follow?

New U.S. News rankings rate how easy 25 diets are to follow. How much weight should you give this?

By [ANGELA HAUPT](#)

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Losing weight is never going to be a piece of cake. But obstacles like bland food, a rigid eating schedule, and hours-long meal prep make sticking to a diet—and seeing the number on the scale steadily decline—much less likely. That's why it's smart to look for a plan or approach that's relatively easy to follow.

"It's always going to be hard at first, but you're more likely to be able to live with some diets than you are others," says registered dietitian [Andrea Giancoli](#), who serves on U.S. News's Best Diets panel of [22 experts in nutrition and diet](#). "You don't want something that's immediately setting you up for failure."

Accordingly, for Best Diets 2012, U.S. News has added a new [Easiest Diets to Follow](#) set of rankings to six others, from Best Diets Overall to Best Weight-Loss Diets, that we published in 2011. The new rankings

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rely on the expert panel's ratings of each of 25 popular diets from 5 (best) to 1 (worst) depending on how much difficulty the judges thought dieters would have in getting used to a diet, how much taste appeal they felt it would offer, how full they believed it would make dieters feel, and how many rules would have to be obeyed.

The experts put [Weight Watchers](#) at the top of the Easiest to Follow standings. They liked that it's flexible, tasty, and allows for plenty of eating throughout the day—nothing is off limits, and there's no need for dieters to go hungry. Weight Watchers was followed by [Jenny Craig](#), the [Mediterranean diet](#), [Slim-Fast](#), and [Volumetrics](#). Here's a behind-the-curtains look at what the experts were asked to consider. They apply to any diet, not just the 25 we ranked.

Initial adjustment. One day you're living on pasta, white bread, chicken wings, and potato chips. The next it's lean chicken breast, green vegetables, and quinoa. Any diet inevitably changes meal and snack habits. But a plan that eases you into a new way of eating, still allows for the occasional splurge, and doesn't exclude entire food groups is easier to follow than one that puts you in a dietary straitjacket. "A diet is much more doable if it allows for most foods—even treats—in appropriate amounts," Giancoli says. "Depriving yourself often backfires."

The experts lauded diets like Weight Watchers and Volumetrics, which don't take entire categories of food off the table. And they liked the [Abs diet](#)'s weekly "cheat meal," when you can indulge yourself however you want. Mediterranean dieters are encouraged to have a glass or two of wine each day, so you don't suddenly have to scrub all alcohol from your routine. Less-than-stellar marks went to the rules-driven [Dukan diet](#), which is extremely restrictive, labeling even the slightest slip-up a destructive mistake. And [Paleo](#) dieters must eliminate anything the cavemen didn't eat—including refined sugar,



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dairy, legumes, and grains. Suddenly flipping the switch to off makes sticking to a diet significantly less likely.

Satiety. All diets aren't equally good at giving you the satisfied feeling that you've had enough. Feeling full makes a diet more bearable: If your stomach is constantly grumbling, or you're forced to go long stretches without eating, you're more likely to break down and binge on whatever is in close proximity. That's one reason Volumetrics landed near the top of the Easiest to Follow list. The plan revolves around fruits, vegetables, soups, and other low-density foods that help control appetite, and the daily menu includes plentiful snacks and even dessert.

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