

CLUB INDUSTRY

How to Talk to Members about Diet Fads

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From Paleo to liquid cleanses, your members are constantly on the hunt for the latest diet trends. They might see the success stories from a TV talk show, a Google search or even their friends' Facebook posts.

As interest in diet fads grows, consumers are finding an abundance of information that may or may not be correct. Sixty-six percent of 500 registered dietitians surveyed said that consumers' interest in nutrition and weight loss will only grow in 2014, according to a report in the nutrition trade magazine *Today's Dietitian*. Seventy-five percent also said that consumers would digest a preponderance of misinformation.

With an increasing amount of information on diet fads, many members are looking to their health clubs' staff, including trainers, to get advice about which trends are effective and which are not. (Related: See "[Understand Five Common Diets So You Can Help Your Members Make Better Choices](#).")

"Trainers are on the front line," says Jasmine Jafferli, a lifestyle and wellness consultant. "They're constantly being watched in what they do, what they eat and how they present themselves."

But like everyone else, trainers and other club staff may have their own opinions about diet fads based on their individual experiences. To keep a consistent message at your club, experts recommend these tips on talking with members about diet fads:

Know the limitations. Members often try a fad because they hear about the success stories. But trainers and club staff need to remind members that a diet that works for one person will not necessarily work for another.

For instance, more than half of the respondents in the survey from *Today's Dietitian* said that the Paleo diet would be the most popular diet fad for 2014. And although the plan's emphasis on fruits and vegetables would benefit just about everyone, some people cannot tolerate a diet with such a high consumption of protein, Jafferli says.

"We all have our own unique biochemistry," she says. "One diet is not a one-size-fits-all program."

Provide general nutrition information. Trainers can provide guidance about whether a diet looks sensible and balanced. They can give general rules that work for the majority of members, such as eating more fruits and vegetables, shopping the perimeter of the store, and cooking more meals from scratch.

Clubs also can provide a checklist for trainers to evaluate food plans to see if they are balanced, says Kelli Calabrese, president of Calabrese Fitness Consulting LLC. Trainers can alert members to red flags in a diet, such as an overabundance of macronutrients. However, they should not recommend a specific plan, she says. Trainers should tell members that they should first check with their physicians about a plan, particularly when members have health issues.

Emphasize healthy lifestyle. Trainers can remind members that sometimes fad diets are not sustainable. Although they might have initial success with a fad diet, it might not be a long-term solution for healthy living, according to Cynthia Sass, a registered dietitian, certified personal trainer and author of "S.A.S.S.! Yourself Slim: Conquer Cravings, Drop Pounds and Lose Inches."

"Many of my clients have lost weight with quick-fix approaches, only to gain it all back plus more, and they don't want to go down that road again," Sass says.

To be successful, nutrition plans should look at a person's overall health rather than just his or her diet. According to Sass, club staff should "place the focus not just on weight loss but also on energy, strength, endurance, mood, immunity, digestive health and sleep—all of the things that make us feel well day to day."

Get educated. Most important, club owners should make sure that their trainers have access to nutrition education and research.

"I would include nutrition education as a regular part of the trainers' continuing education," Calabrese says. "There are some very good nutrition certifications out there that trainers can take."

In addition, registered dietitians can be a great resource for members as well as trainers and staff. According to Sass, registered dietitians have the training to keep up with the latest fads and put them in perspective based on research and practical day-to-day life. Plus, they can answer questions in a way that goes beyond just an article or a website video.

"That kind of relationship builds lasting trust," Sass says. "Use [dietitians] as sounding boards and allow them to be the voice of reason."

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