


Yes, There Is a Secret Formula for Weight Loss. This Is It

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Nov. 19, 2024 – Dieting is as American as, well, apple pie. More than half of us want to lose weight at any given time, surveys show, and about a quarter are actually trying to. But success stories that don’t involve weight loss drugs like Ozempic are far less common.

So when stars like [Lizzo](#) and Jelly Roll say they shed dramatic amounts of weight, unmedicated, it gets headlines.

Their secret to weight loss is probably not what you think: It’s personal.



The Truth About Losing Weight

Will hot chili peppers help you shed pounds quicker? Are crash diets the way to go for big results? Separate fact from fiction when it comes to weight loss.

Both singers have described a process that was highly specific to them, based on things like their preferences, cultural influences, and activity levels. And this degree of personalization is the key to lasting, sustainable weight loss, experts say. The celebrities figured out the right options for *them*, and their ideal plan won’t necessarily suit anyone else.

“If you’ve made drastic changes that don’t work for your life, your goals and desires, and the way it fits into everything else in your life, it won’t work,” said Angela Zivkovic, PhD, whose lab at the University of California, Davis, researches how to personalize diets. “There is no one secret formula for everybody. There’s just one secret formula for each individual.”

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Curiously, [Lizzo](#) and Jelly Roll can afford to hire all kinds of experts. But you can devise a just-for-you plan simply by asking the right questions.

There's a simple reason why so many of us try and fail to lose weight with popular diet programs: The human body is anything but simple.

"Weight loss is more complex than we think – it's not just eat less, [exercise](#) more," said Sue-Ellen Anderson-Haynes, [MS](#), a registered dietitian nutritionist and spokesperson for the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. "It could be a specific issue with how your body burns calories, your metabolism, your DNA makeup."

Everything, from your [genes](#) to your [gut microbiome](#) to your taste buds to your daily schedule, plays a role.

"It's what you're eating, what you're not eating, when you're eating, how you're eating, how often you're eating, and also a lot of other things," Zivkovic said. "Like how that interplays with the amount of activity you partake in, and any emotional, cultural, social factors that play into all that."

So while [research](#) shows you can lose weight on almost any diet, unless it aligns with your body and your life, odds are high you'll regain the weight over time.

Establish a Baseline

Step one should be a visit to your doctor or a dietitian. Sounds extreme, but knowing the state of your health will help guide your choices, and your doctor can help measure your progress.

"You want to know, Is my [kidney](#) function OK? Is my liver function OK? Are my [triglycerides](#) really high? How's my [cholesterol](#)? How's my [glucose](#), how's my insulin?" Zivkovic said. "Make sure you have a good sense of your baseline metabolic state, so that when you make decisions for yourself, you can make the right decisions."

For instance, if you've got high cholesterol, your doctor will probably advise against a diet loaded with animal [fat](#), like keto. Blood glucose on the high side? Watch your sugar intake.

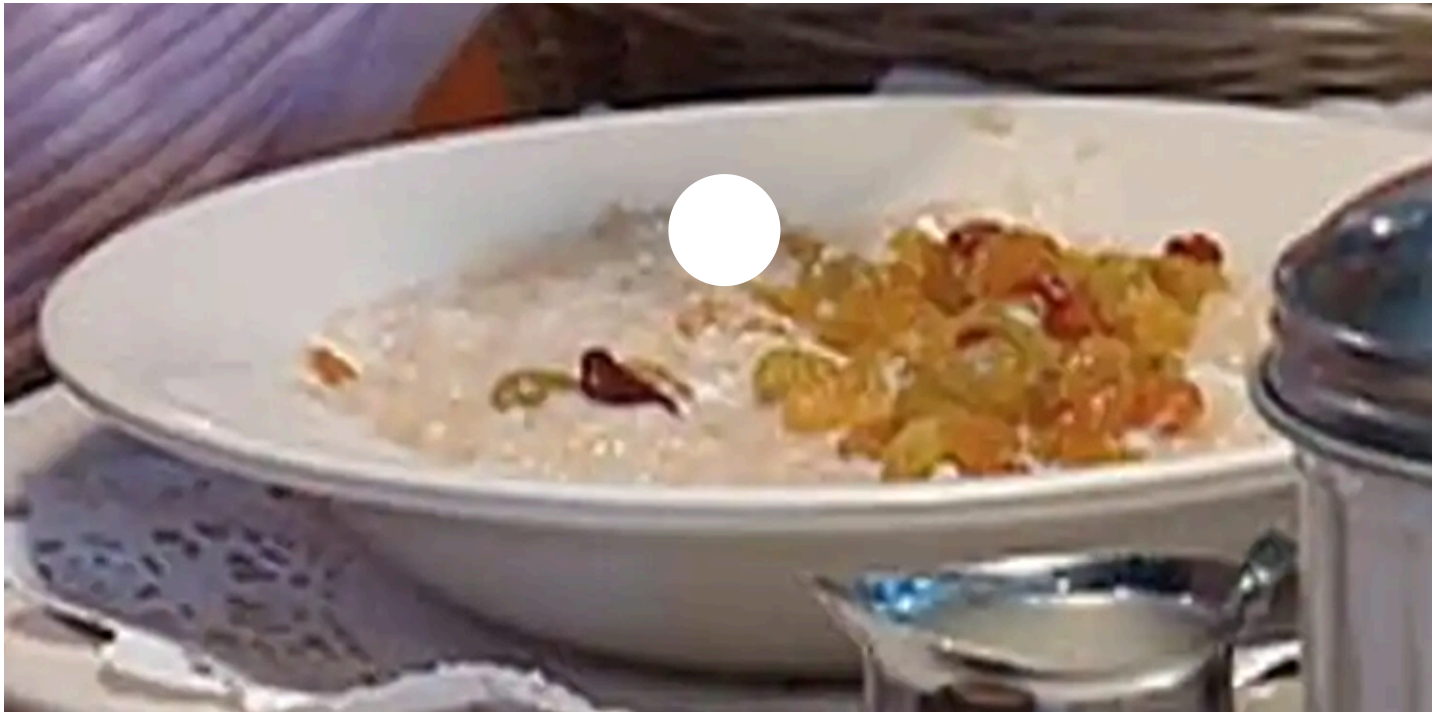
Seeing a professional is especially important if you want to lose weight for specific medical reasons. These may include, for instance, lack of energy, GI symptoms, or irregular periods. "If you're going through something and you need help, I really recommend you seek out an expert," Anderson-Haynes said.

Take this Quiz to Get Started

Next, think about what changes will work for *you*. Let's approach it with a self-quiz.

1. What do you think is at the root of your problem? Zivkovic said an honest answer to this simple question is a good start. It requires self-reflection. She describes one patient who worked with her diligently for weeks before admitting that every afternoon, they ate a bag of packaged cookies. Maybe that sounds familiar, or maybe you're a busy parent who nibbles food off your kids' plates. Weight loss can come from small adjustments to problematic habits. "These difficult things have to be put on the table at some point," Zivkovic said. "Maybe it takes a while to get to, but you have to first admit to it."

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Weight Loss Secret Weapon

Whether you are trying to lose weight or maintain your current weight, there is a key secret weapon you should know.

2. What do you like to eat, and what turns you off? This includes food allergies or intolerances. The best weight loss program is the one you'll stick to, experts have said for decades. Nobody says you have to eat a big salad for lunch every day if that's not your thing.

3. What have you already tried before? What felt comfortable and what felt like torture?

Obviously, don't try something that failed. For many people, a personalized version of the Mediterranean diet works well. This means, generally, lots of fresh [vegetables](#), whole grains, nuts, and [legumes](#), and olive oil as the principal fat source, with fish and poultry providing most of the protein. "It's tasty enough to want to have in your life, but also healthy enough and hard to overeat because it's so high in fiber," Zivkovic said. "I'm not saying it's the right thing for everybody, but there are so many different things you can fine-tune in there."

4. How do you socialize, and how often? Restaurant meals and party food can derail a too-strict plan, so be sure to take them into account. Again, you can still socialize – just adjust your approach to make it less dangerous to your diet. That might mean something as simple as ordering the side salad instead of fries, or as clever as asking your server to put half your meal in a doggie bag before it comes to the table.

5. What won't you give up? Even on the road, Jelly Roll wanted to enjoy the flavors of home. In an Instagram reel, his nutrition coach showed how he prepares a protein-rich, air-fried version of the singer's beloved Nashville hot chicken and french fries.

Likewise, if you just can't live without sweets, ask yourself: "How often do you need a sweet treat to feel satisfied?" Zivkovic said. "And you say, 'I could be perfectly happy if every Saturday night I could have ice cream.' Great. You can totally work that in." Start with your non-negotiable foods and work backward from there.

6. What's your current activity level? How much more are you willing to do? Weight loss isn't as simple as calories in, calories out, but you do need to burn off more than you take in. The key is to find physical activity you enjoy, so you'll keep doing it. Did you play a sport in high school? Always wanted to learn salsa dancing? Maybe you'd rather incorporate small bursts of movement into your daily life, like opting for the stairs over the elevator, or parking at the far side of the lot. Try adding one more action each week – you'll begin to notice opportunities everywhere you look.

8. How does culture affect your food choices? If kosher or [halal](#) guidelines are important to you, factor that in. Same goes for eating local or sustainable foods. It's your life, so make room for cultural considerations. Don't give them up, said Anderson-Haynes, but adjust. "In my culture, we tend to fry plantains," she said. "If you're trying to cut your fat intake, you can air-fry, or spray them and bake in the oven. Or maybe instead of having plantains every day, you have them once a week, and you fry them with less oil or use healthier oil."

For many, overly strict diets are likely to fail. It's unlikely you'll nail your specific dietary details from day one, but only you can know what fits your lifestyle. Adjust as you go – and even when you find something that works, don't expect it to work forever. In a recent TikTok, Lizzo explained why she transitioned away from a [vegan](#) diet. “After tests and research, I found that animal proteins helped me have more energy, lose weight, and helped with my mental fog,” she said. “This is the diet that’s helped me reach my goals and helped me feel good in my body.”

Sources

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