

Lose weight the French way

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HAVE you ever wondered why most French women appear to be effortlessly slim? The answer could lie in their diet. Not the Mediterranean diet, but a weight-loss program that has been taking the country by storm.

When French nutritionist Dr Pierre Dukan introduced his Dukan Diet there 10 years ago, the book rushed to the top of the French bestseller list and spawned a dieting revolution.

Today, more than 1.5 million French women swear by its dramatic and long-lasting results.

Politicians, film stars and high-profile models, including Gisele Bündchen and Jennifer Lopez, live the Dukan life, all of them seduced by its promise of permanent slenderness while eating what you like.

The basic rules

The Dukan Diet starts with a short Attack phase, where you eat nothing but protein – just meat, fish, eggs and non-fat dairy products.

This is the kick-start that gives you the initial impetus and sets the tone for the other phases.

This stage produces immediate results – you can lose as much as three kilograms in five days.

You can stick to the Attack phase for as little as one day or as long as 10 days, but if your goal weight is 12 to 20 kilograms away, then five days produces the best results.

If you have about six kilograms to lose, two or three days on the Attack phase works well; if you are looking to slim down by only three kilograms, a single day in the Attack phase (where you'd be expected to lose one kilogram instantly) is often enough to get you started.

A short-term, protein-rich regime purges the tissues of excess water, dulls the appetite (if you eat only protein, your body produces ketonic cells, which are powerful natural appetite suppressants), while maintaining muscle tone.

Proteins are relatively low in kilojoules (compared with fats and many carbohydrates) and their complex structure means the body has to work hard to digest them – you will burn more kilojoules processing protein than any other food.

After one to 10 days in the Attack phase, dieters move on to the Cruise phase. This is the workhorse stage of the diet, where you alternate pure protein days with days when you add vegetables to your protein.

Weight will fall off at a rate of about one kilogram a week, but with a range of meat and vegetables to choose from, you won't be hungry.



Attack phase ... Protein like meat and fish is the focus of the first stage of the Dukan Diet. The Sunday Telegraph

No more constraints

When you reach your ideal weight the Consolidation phase kicks in, releasing dietary constraints and putting fruit, bread, cheese and starchy foods such as pasta back on the menu.

You are even encouraged to have two totally unrestrained celebration meals a week.

This is a doctor's recommendation and an important part of the diet's acceptance that you can relish food and stay slim forever.

You won't lose weight in this phase, but nor will you gain weight.

Consolidation has been designed to stop you going back to your former eating habits and to set your body's equilibrium.

If you stick to the plan for five days, for every 0.5 kilograms you lost in previous phases, your body will consolidate the weight loss.

When your time in Consolidation is up and your weight has stabilised, you are free to eat and drink whatever you like for the rest of your life, but you must adhere to that one Dukan rule: protein only on Thursdays. Forever.

Phase one: attack

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Phase two: cruising

This next phase consists of two alternating diets. This is the workhorse stage, where you alternate pure protein days with days when you add an array of unlimited vegetables to your wide selection of meat, fish and no-fat dairy products. Expect to lose about one kilogram a week.

The most efficient way to work this stage is to spend one day on the pure protein Attack diet, and the next on a protein and vegetable diet, switching between the two, one day at a time, until you reach your chosen weight.

However, some people prefer to work to a rhythm of five days of protein followed by five days of protein plus vegetables, or, if you have only a little weight to lose, try two days of pure protein a week (say Mondays and Thursdays), with every other day protein combined with vegetables.

Now you can introduce the following vegetables – raw, steamed, boiled or baked (in foil) – with your meat or fish: artichoke, asparagus, broccoli, cabbage (white, red, Savoy, cauliflower, kale, brussels sprout), capsicum, celery, celeriac, chicory, cucumber, eggplant, fennel, French beans, leeks, mushrooms, onion, pumpkin, radish, salad leaves (lettuce, rocket, watercress), sorrel, soy beans, spinach, swede, Swiss chard, tomatoes, turnip, zucchini.

In principle, you can eat as many of these vegetables as you like, whenever you like, but if you want speedy weight loss, it's best not to eat vegetables with complete abandon – it's better to eat until you no longer feel hungry.

Carrots and beetroot are on the list of vegetables too, but they are quite starchy, so avoid having them with every meal and, while you're in this phase, steer completely away from starchy vegetables such as potatoes, rice, corn, peas, beans, lentils and avocado (it is technically a fruit anyway).

Don't worry if your weight loss plateaus occasionally on the days when you eat vegetables. This is merely the water levels resetting themselves. Stick with it. The weight will fall off.

Phase three: consolidation

The third stage of the Dukan Diet – the Consolidation phase – provides an important period of transition between hard-line dieting and a return to normal eating.

Clinical evidence shows that the high-risk period for regaining weight after a diet is about five days for every 0.5 kilograms lost.

But don't despair - if you have missed meat pies or curry, or if you have been longing to finish your meal with a real dessert, your time has come to indulge again.

In the Consolidation phase you follow a more open diet, but one which is not yet free from all constraints. Nourishing yourself is not just about taking in enough kilojoules to survive; it is also about enjoying eating.

It is now time to reintroduce this biological pleasure which was taken away from you.

Eat as much protein and vegetables (together) each day as you want without any restriction on quantity, time of day or combination.

- Add one serving of fruit per day (avoid high-sugar fruits such as bananas, grapes, cherries, dried fruits and high-fat nuts).
- Enjoy two slices of wholemeal bread per day, spread with fat-reduced butter.
- Have one serving (40 grams) of hard cheese per day (but avoid blue cheese, soft cheese or goat's cheese).
- Factor in one serving of starchy foods per week in the first half of your Consolidation phase, increasing to two servings per week in the second half. This includes pasta (a 225-gram serving with tomato, not creamy, sauce and with no oil), couscous or polenta (225 grams cooked in stock, not butter or oil), lentils, beans, chickpeas, rice (ideally brown) and potatoes (but only occasionally and without butter).
- Broaden your meat repertoire to include any quantity of lamb, roast pork and ham (remove all fat first) once or twice a week.
- Let your hair down and plan and enjoy one celebration meal a week in the first half of the Consolidation phase, increasing to two meals in the second half. In this meal you really can eat whatever you want – and you should choose foods that you've missed during the weight-loss period.
- But there are two important conditions to this celebration meal: never have second helpings of the same dish and never eat two celebration meals in a row (if you splurge on Tuesday night, at Wednesday's breakfast the success of your diet is on the line). Have one of each: one starter, one main, one dessert and one glass of wine. Have reasonable quantities of each dish and alcohol, but have only one of each.
- You should still stick to having one pure protein day per week, say, Thursdays. This is your insurance policy against gaining weight again.
- Have two tablespoons of oat bran per day (as a pancake or sprinkled on food).
- Walk for 25 minutes per day (longer if you enjoy it and have time).

Phase four: stabilisation

When you have successfully completed the Consolidation stage of the diet (five days for every 0.5 kilograms you lost in the Attack and Cruise phases), you are ready for the fourth and final stage of the Dukan Diet.

Your new slim body will have given up its extreme reactivity, wanting to extract every last kilojoule from everything you eat, and your metabolism will be calmer.

But experience shows the likelihood of regaining weight will remain if you do not incorporate into your lifestyle a number of habits specifically designed to deal with this risk.

The Stabilisation stage of the Dukan Diet offers permanent slenderness in return for four simple, extremely effective but non-negotiable measures that you should follow for the rest of your life.

Stabilisation rules

- Go back to eating whatever you like, but continue to use the basic rules of the Consolidation phase as a safety platform (eat unlimited protein and vegetables, one piece of fruit a day, two slices of wholemeal bread, a portion of cheese, two starchy foods and two celebration meals a week). Use this as your back-up if you are under threat of regaining weight.
- Pick one day a week for the rest of your life when you eat nothing but protein. This is the key that allows you to eat normally for the other days of the week. (Drink at least two litres of water to flush the digestive system).
- Vow to walk briskly for 20 minutes every day.
- Increase your daily oat bran intake to three tablespoons and stick to it for life.