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Traffic Light Diet

Also referred to as the Stop Light Diet, the Traffic Light Diet is an 8-week program created by Leonard H. Epstein for use in his childhood weight management research. In addition to nutrition guidelines, this diet approach sometimes includes therapy and family-based communication components, depending on the setting and healthcare professionals involved. The goal of the Traffic Light Diet is to provide optimal nutrition while keeping calories to a minimum.

Foods are divided into five main categories:

- fruits and vegetables
- grains
- milk and dairy
- protein
- other

Foods are also color-coded according to caloric-density per average serving.

- Green foods contain less than 20 calories per average serving
- Yellow foods are moderate in calorie density.
- Red foods are high in fat and added sugars.
- Examples of green foods are fruits and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains, and low-fat dairy products. Yellow foods include red meat, potatoes, popcorn, and snacks like granola bars. Red foods include French fries, candy, and refined baked goods, to name a few.

Those on the Traffic Light Diet are advised to consume 900-1,200 calories daily, depending on their physical status as determined by a healthcare professional. Goals of the diet include remaining within the prescribed calorie range and eating no more than four red foods per week.

After the initial, somewhat extreme phase of the diet, participants are provided instructions by a healthcare professional to develop a maintenance calorie level, which involves gradually increasing the diet by 100 calories each week until weight gain occurs.

Foods to include:

- Vegetables
- Fruits
- Whole grains
- Beans
- Lean protein
- Low-fat dairy

Foods to avoid:

- High-fat and sugar foods in excess
- Processed foods in excess

Pros:

- Diet has shown to promote child and adult weight-loss in clinical settings
- Rules and color-coding are easy-to-follow

Cons:

- No physical activity component included
- No foods are completely off limits

Sources:

The Traffic Light Diet and Treating Childhood Obesity www.andevidencelibrary.com