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San Francisco

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AND RESTLESS:
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[**EAT+DRINK** HAUTE TACOS, COOL CEVICHE,
KILLER MEZCAL AND ICE-COLD BEER]

slim chances

Welcome to an era of diet fads aplenty. But do they work?

by Marin Preske

Remember when all we had to worry about was the humble calorie? Now we're obsessing over trans fats, soluble fiber, the glycemic index, blood types and the despotic carbohydrate. Which would be fine—if it were any easier to wrangle yourself into those slim-cut Habitual jeans. But the fact remains that Americans have become fatter than ever. One out of every three of us is obese. In a 2001 study, the US Surgeon General estimated that this clinical condition causes nearly three hundred thousand deaths a year in the US. And even in health-conscious California, more than three million children are overweight. Somewhere between TrimSpa and bariatric surgery, our waistlines got the best of us.

Although exercise and portion control are undisputed methods of weight loss, they're simply not enough. We want to be told what to eat so much that we're even willing to eliminate entire food groups. Nowhere is this more evident than in the

low-carb mania that has swept the nation. "Even reduced-calorie products

such as Slim Fast are joining the bandwagon," says Rania Batayneh, nutritionist for the Sports Club/LA. "As with the low-fat craze, we're going to get even fatter."

In the wake of the carb-phobic *Dr. Atkins' New Diet Revolution*, the smash spinoff of the 1972 publication, a

bevy of strategies have emerged—the most popular being *The South Beach Diet* (a fixture on the *New York Times* best-seller list). The program revolves around controlling blood-sugar levels via the glycemic index (GI)—a measurement of how quickly foods spike insulin, or "fat hormone," levels. "With the South Beach Diet, it's possible that an intake of higher protein and lower carbohydrate is of some benefit," says Carol Porter, Ph.D., R.D., director of nutrition and food services at UCSF Medical Center. Although the book's testimonials are inspiring and its recipes helpful, dining out is next to impossible.

The less-mainstream *Eat Right For Your Type* uses an individual's blood type to determine which foods best meet dietetic goals. Chapters organized by plasma type outline "good" and "bad" items (this even gets as precise as red



WAIST NOT WANT NOT: With one in every three Americans now obese, our nation's battle of the bulge is proving to be a losing fight.

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snapper, sherbet and Parmesan). "It's counterintuitive," admits 28-year-old interior designer Leslie Hotchkiss. "What I eat doesn't necessarily correlate to anyone else's diet." Marking her sixth straight year on the plan, Hotchkiss credits the regime for alleviating the chronic fatigue and digestive issues that had plagued her as a vegetarian.

"I don't feel deprived at all," she says, "but my fiancé is a different blood type, so it's hard to cook a meal that's healthy for both of us."

Then there's the 43-year-old *Weight Watchers* plus, which allows dieters to eat what they want as long as they don't surpass the day's allotted "point" quota (each food has a certain number of points). "My clients on *Weight Watchers* have the most success because of the variety," says Traci Higgins, owner of Dining In, a local personal-chef service that caters to clients' dietary needs. "When you begin to cut things out, it starts a mental process of deprivation. Psychologically, we focus on what we can't have rather than what we can." But, as Dr. Porter observes, "The downside is that someone can have a big slice of cheesecake and then not eat for the rest of the day."

Even amid all the conflicting theories, there are certain commonalities. Refined sugar is bad; caffeine is dehydrating; protein needs may increase during weight loss; and there's no such thing as a miracle diet. To ease the conundrum, Batayneh recommends a metabolism test to determine the sum of calories you burn naturally per day. From there, an eating strategy can be developed. "Most of the US wants to think they have a metabolic disorder," she says. "In reality, only 2 percent have one. You must learn to use what you have." And then those jeans will be sliding up with ease in no time. a

WEIGHING IN

Whether you want to gauge your metabolic rate (BPM) or require a more thorough analysis (from \$180), **RANIA BATAYNEH** (415-633-2900, www.thesportclubla.com) can tailor her services to your needs. Each month at the Sports Club/LA San Francisco, she hosts a nutrition-focused seminar (\$50 for members, \$55 for nonmembers that includes a full dinner.

UCSF MEDICAL CENTER offers counseling clinics (\$124 per 30-minute session) that provide general dietary and nutritional information (415-353-2291, www.ucsf.edu). A weight-management program is also available under the clinical guidance of a physician and registered dietitian (415-353-2700).

Personal-chef service **DINING IN** caters to most dietary needs (415-375-2052, www.dininginof.com). For \$300 a month, **Dining In** offers a special package with Rock Solid Fitness (415-739-5600, www.rock-solidfit.com) that includes five meals a week and an unlimited number of fitness classes.

A quick search on the **WEIGHT WATCHERS** site (www.weight-watchers.com) produces a number of locations for weekly meetings in the San Francisco area. An online program is another option.