Should You Try the Whole 30?

In April 2009, Melissa Hartwig was feeling sluggish and unsatisfied by her diet. So she, along with husband Dallas Hartwig, set out to eat squeaky-clean Paleo for 30 days. The results? So good that they created the Whole 30 Program you've been seeing all over your Facebook feed. Find out if the monthlong clean-eating streak is right for you.

What Is the Whole 30, Exactly?

The basic guidelines: Cut out "hormone-unbalancing, gut-disrupting, inflammatory food groups," including sugar, dairy, alcohol, grains, and legumes (sorry, no hummus or peanut butter!). You should also read the nutrition labels on all foods and avoid carrageenan, MSG, and sulfites.

One key difference between the Whole 30 and similar eating plans like Paleo (Whole 30 is technically based on a Paleo framework) or an Atkins plan (which is more focused on cutting carbs): You can't recreate your favorite foods by modifying the ingredients. So no making yourself pizza with a cauliflower crust. In the words of co-founder Melissa Hartwig, "The fake version is never as good and usually leaves you craving the real thing even more." Womp womp.

Benefits of the Whole 30

Hartwig says the program improves energy, sleep, digestive issues (gas, bloating, pain, constipation, or diarrhea), skin, joint pain/swelling, asthma, migraines, and biomarkers like blood pressure, cholesterol, and fasting blood sugar. She also says 96 percent of participants lose weight on the program, without counting calories, or weighing or measuring their food.

"Limiting your intake of most processed foods, especially the simple processed sugars and excess processed fats, will help change your habits," says Linda Raynes, nutritionist and author of *No Time for Diets*. "Habits are formed over a thirteen-week period, so the four-week period of changing your normal routine is a good

start." Plus, you'll be able to identify potential allergies to grains and dairy, after you introduce them back into your diet. Once your body has had a chance to reset, you'll be able to easily see if any of these things make you feel tired, bloated, or foggy.

The Downsides to the Whole 30
You mean, besides being cranky? If you take a high-protein, low-carb approach (you don't *need* to though: potatoes are technically allowed, but grains—even whole ones—are not), your body can enter a ketotic state. When you don't have enough carbs to burn for energy, the body breaks down fat to use, which releases ketones. When it has to break down too much fat, ketone levels can get too high and the kidneys can malfunction.

If you're doing the Whole 30 for a medical reason, talk to your doc first. If you're just looking for a structured way to clean up your diet and cut processed foods, the extreme nature of the plan could take a toll. Example: If you break just one rule, you'll need to start all over—yes, even on day 29. "People often feel like they've lost all they've worked so hard for, leading to self-loathing and giving up entiirely," says certified nutritionist Franci Cohen. "Eating healthy, whole foods does not need to be this extreme." That said, if you respond to structure and are an otherwise healthy person, go for it (and keep the above note on carbs in mind). Here, some additional tips from Hartwig to get you through the month:

- Plan ahead. Make a meal plan, clean out your pantry, stock up on emergency food for the office or travel, and create a plan for handling stressful situations like a family dinner or birthday party. You *will* be tested and tempted. The key is to be prepared.
- Seek support. Join one of the Whole 30 free, online communities for accountability, advice, and resources. If you can find a friend or partner to take on the challenge with you, sign them up! It'll certainly mean more options at your next potluck brunch.
- Don't weigh yourself during the challenge. While, yes, you'll probably drop pounds by the end of the month, save the scale comparisons for the finale. It'll distract from the *real* point—to eat healthy, whole foods.