

Don't starve. Just eat.

A HEALTHY FIX Dieting does not mean depriving yourself of food, says celebrity nutritionist Pooja Makhija in a conversation with **Arundhati Pattabhiraman**

Diet. Nutrition. Healthy Eating. These are probably the most googled words today. And with so much information online, it isn't surprising that most of us are confused about what's on our plate, how many calories our meals contain, and if we are eating right.

However, according to celebrity nutritionist Pooja Makhija, the rules of food can be summed up in just two words: "eat clean". Having been in this field for the last 15 to 20 years, Pooja has taught the likes of Deepika Padukone, Karan Johar, Sonam Kapoor, Sushmita Sen and many others the tricks of healthy eating.

Pooja's no-frills approach to dieting is evident in her book *Eat. Delete.* where she has clarified that there are no quick-fix solutions to weight loss, and that it is a process that requires sustained effort, which can only be achieved through healthy lifestyle choices.

In a conversation with DH Living, Pooja talks about wrongful food habits, diet fads and more:

Having worked in the health industry, what changes have you seen in the Indian food habits?

I think people have become more conscious about food and nutrition. Whether at the dinner table or on social media, food is always the hot topic of discussion. But although the awareness has increased, there is a lot of misinformation doing the rounds. Many are falling prey to crash diets and unhealthy fads. I learn about a new diet fad every other day!

Which are some of the misconceptions that dieters often have?

- The biggest misconception that people have is that they have to starve to lose weight. No, you don't need to give up eating to lose weight. You can eat everything, but in moderation. Don't make food your enemy.
- The second misconception is that if you exercise, you can eat anything you want and give yourself a treat for your efforts. It's a great thing to work out and burn extra calories, but that doesn't mean you end up rewarding yourself with unnecessary junk since you've earned it. That's nullifying the effort completely.
- Another misconception is about drinking excess water. The more you drink, the more your body swells up. No, that's not true. Water is crucial. The more you drink, the more toxins will be flushed out from your body. So drink, drink, drink.



• Another thing that people do is to avoid sugars all together. While sugar does add calories, avoiding it completely gets you to a place where you crave for it and finally give in to the craving. Rather than avoiding sugar, I advise people to move to natural sugar substitutes. They give the same sweetness as sugar, without the calories.

Many people depend on sugar substitutes on a daily basis. How safe is the consumption of these sweeteners?

In my opinion, natural sugar substitutes are absolutely safe. Using plant extract sweeteners such as stevia will not harm your body. It can also help in addressing lifestyle disorders like obesity and cardiovascular diseases.

Which is 'the' most frequently asked diet query that you have encountered?

About weight loss. People want to know how they can continue eating what they like without completely giving it up. The tricks to continue eating desserts, while keeping a check on weight, is something I'm always asked about.

Most of us have a troubled relationship with food (which is either a stress buster or a stress inducer). Describe your relationship with food.

What I strongly believe in and teach everyone around me is to learn to treat food like a 'fuel'. Don't eat because you are bored, lonely or rejoicing. Food to your body is just like what petrol is to a car. You don't put fuel in your car because you are bored or lonely. It's

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your staple diet and just switch to quinoa or kale. Quinoa is not so freely available in our country, so try the easily available staples like flax seeds, amaranth, *amla*, and all fruits.

Is it proper to shun carbs from one's meal plan?

No, not at all. If you eliminate one food group completely, you end up with hair loss, insomnia, mood swings and fatigue.

What are your diet goals for the year?

My main diet goal is to encourage everyone to eat what is culturally ours. It is time we switch to locally sourced food and follow the farm-to-table concept.

important to treat food the same way. We eat because food nourishes and strengthens our body. It's the only way to get the beautiful skin or the healthy hair that we all want. So, basically, if you deprive your body of food, you are depriving it of all the luxuries.

What are some of the go-to foods that are ideal for weight loss?

Avoid foods that slow down your metabolism. Sugar should definitely be avoided. Other healthier plant-based substitutes are always welcome.

There are so many theories about detoxing. What does the term actually mean, and how does one go about detoxing the body?

I believe that our body is magical and it is detoxifying every minute of the day. Each time I breathe in oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide, my body is detoxing. Every time I visit the bathroom, I'm detoxing. Each day that I have a clean bowel movement, my body has eliminated the toxins. Our body is basically detoxing without going on harsh detox diets.

Which are some of the Indian staples or super foods that one must include in their diet?

Super foods are just the cherry on the cake and not the cake itself. They are add-ons that you consume along with your usual meal. It doesn't make sense to abandon

