

A very low-calorie diet (VLCD) is one where you consume 800 calories or less per day, much lower than the recommended 2000-2500 calories for adults.



How does it work?

VLCDs often involve replacing meals with soups, shakes, and bars, gradually reintroducing other foods. Although rapid weight loss can be motivating, it's hard to maintain long-term without professional support and behaviour changes.

While this diet can lead to significant weight loss, it should only be followed under medical supervision for up to 12 weeks. If you take medication for diabetes, blood pressure, or cholesterol, your doctor may need to adjust your doses.

How effective are VLCDs?

If your BMI is over 30, a very low-calorie diet (VLCD) can help you lose about 3-5 pounds (1-2 kg) per week, with an average total loss of 44 pounds (20 kg) over 12 weeks.

This weight loss may improve conditions like type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Studies show VLCDs can improve HbA1c levels in people with diabetes, and suggest that they are effective for short-term weight loss.

After 12 weeks, you'll slowly reintroduce foods while incorporating regular physical activity to maintain your progress and support a healthy lifestyle.

BE AWARE!

If you are on medication for type 2 diabetes that puts you at risk of hypoglycaemia, such as insulin therapy, sulphonylureas or glinides, VLCD's can significantly increase the risk of having a hypo. You should always speak to your healthcare team or GP if you are planning on changing your diet plan so they can help you do this safely.

Are VLCDs safe to follow?

Very low-calorie diets should be done through programmes like the NHS Type 2 Diabetes Path to Remission to ensure proper nutrition and medical supervision. They aren't recommended for people:

- under 18,
- pregnant
- breastfeeding
- with a history of eating disorders

Always talk to your healthcare team before starting any diet changes for safe guidance.