

THE RISE AND FALL OF FAD DIETS: HOW THE NEWS MEDIA FRAME AND REPRESENT THE ATKINS DIET, 1972-2005

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to study how newspapers, an important outlet from which individuals seek health information, frame fad diets. This study examines coverage of the Atkins diet, one of the most popular fad diets in history, and how it was framed from 1975—when it was first introduced—to 2005. This research also uses the public health model to look at the presentation of public health facts in Atkins diet stories.

This study included a content analysis of 92 news stories, results of a Lexis-Nexis search. Results from the research showed that more stories were framed negatively than positively, and most contained health facts that were not in support of the Atkins diet. This indicates that the story frames primarily reflected the publicized health effectiveness of the diet. On an average, there were (almost) at least one of each public health fact present in each story. And for health information, journalists primarily turned to scientists/researchers for health information about the Atkins diet. This demonstrated that most reporters sought medical-and-research-supported health information for Atkins stories.