

Cost and Health Analysis of the Jenny Craig Diet

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Abstract

Today, one of the biggest targets of the consumer market is focusing on society's concern with obesity. With dozens of diets available, how is one to decide which ones are healthful and effective? The Jenny Craig diet, which supplies its customers with pre-packaged, frozen food, claims dramatic and long-lasting results if people follow their diet plan. Because customers on the diet plan need to purchase their food directly from Jenny Craig, cost is one of the most significant factors in whether or not one will lose weight on the program. Customers on the diet can expect prices to run higher than \$3,000 for a target weight loss of 100 pounds in three months. Although one can lose weight while following the diet plan on one of its "lower" tiers, the amount one spends on food and supplements provided by Jenny Craig directly corresponds to how much weight Jenny Craig claims one will lose on the diet.

Introduction

The Jenny Craig diet, established in Australia in 1983 and in America in 1985, claims to do to be both healthful and effective. The diet claims dramatic and long-lasting results by means of providing its customers with pre-packaged, frozen food. This can be beneficial because of the experience and support of the staff on hand, planned menus, and online journals and support groups. On the other hand, its drawbacks include high cost, especially the cost of hidden extras, like additional vitamins and supplements (5). Customers on the diet need to purchase the food directly from Jenny Craig, with prices rising beyond \$1,000 per month.

I hypothesize that because the Jenny Craig diet provides its customers with pre-packaged, frozen food, that it is actually ineffective and unhealthy. On the surface, the diet *seems* as though it may be healthful—the dietary balance is 50- 60% carbohydrates, 20- 25% protein, and 20-25% fat. But because the food is pre-packaged and frozen, it seems that the meals are unlikely to provide proper nutrition. While the diet may be effective for weight loss, it is not a healthy one.

Method

The nutrition facts for my poster came from Jenny Craig's official website. Actual meal plans were investigated by indicating that I might join the Jenny Craig plan. I also consulted peer-reviewed scholarly articles from sources such as [Environmental Nutrition](#) and [Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners](#).

Results

In Figs. 1 and 2, it is shown that there is a connection between the cost of the Jenny Craig program and weight loss. Cost may be a determining factor in why people choose to go off of the diet. The cost is derived from the price of food, not necessarily the price of membership. Therefore, the longer one stays on the Jenny Craig program, the more food one buys, the more weight one is supposed to lose, and the more money one spends.

Table 1 Comparison of Programs: 100-Pound Weight Loss

	Jenny Craig	LA Weight Loss	Weight Watchers
Membership cost	\$399	\$756 ^a	\$20
Miscellaneous costs	\$0	\$69 ^b	\$0
Required food/food supplements	\$3,000 ^c	\$998 ^d	\$0
Vitamins	\$305 ^e	\$0	\$0
Per week additional cost	\$0	\$0	\$672 ^f
TOTAL	\$3,704	\$1,823	\$692

Table 2 Comparison of Programs: 50-Pound Weight Loss

	Jenny Craig	LA Weight Loss	Weight Watchers
Membership cost	\$399	\$581 ^a	\$20
Miscellaneous costs	\$0	\$69 ^b	\$0
Food/food supplements	\$1,490 ^c	\$499 ^d	\$0
Vitamins	\$153 ^e	\$0	\$0
Per week additional cost	\$0	\$0	\$372
TOTAL	\$1,964	\$1,149	\$392^f

Results (continued)

Fig. 1 is my "constructed" meal plan. Although Jenny Craig states that the diet has options for a vegetarian, I found it difficult to construct a healthy diet based on the options available. Therefore, I had to construct a diet as if I were a meat-eater. Fig. 2 shows the nutritional content of the seven day program. The ratio of carbohydrates, protein and fat are not in the ratio the diet claims.

Discussion

Cost, food choice and preliminary evaluation led to further investigation and results. While cost is a determining factor in the Jenny Craig diet, the analysis of the nutritional data is of concern. The menu that was created for me was based on a 1,200 calorie/day restriction. However, I analyzed the Estimated Energy Requirement for a female who is between 19-30 years old, and weighs 125 lbs., and found it to be 2,403 (7)—therefore, the caloric restriction on the Jenny Craig Diet is *less than half* of the EER for a young female. Similarly, 46 g protein, 25 g fiber, 75 g total fat, and 130 carbohydrate are recommended (7). As can be seen in Fig. 2, the values for fat and fiber fall substantially below the RDAs. While Jenny Craig is a diet plan for weight loss, it is most certainly not safe.

Jenny Craig is also much more expensive than other plans. LA Weight Loss and Weight Watchers are two similar diet plans. The high cost and poor nutritional content of the Jenny Craig diet just may be why, as part of a Federal Trade Commission assertion, the company "must now warn that most people who sign on do not keep off the weight they lose" (1).

The nutritional content of the food alone is detrimental. But in 1998, Jenny Craig had to temporarily withdraw from the market due to side effects of heart valve damage because Redux and fenfluramine (given as part of a popular two-drug combination called "fen-phen") were being included in the supplements that they sold (3, 4).

References

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Photos taken from www.jennycraig.com

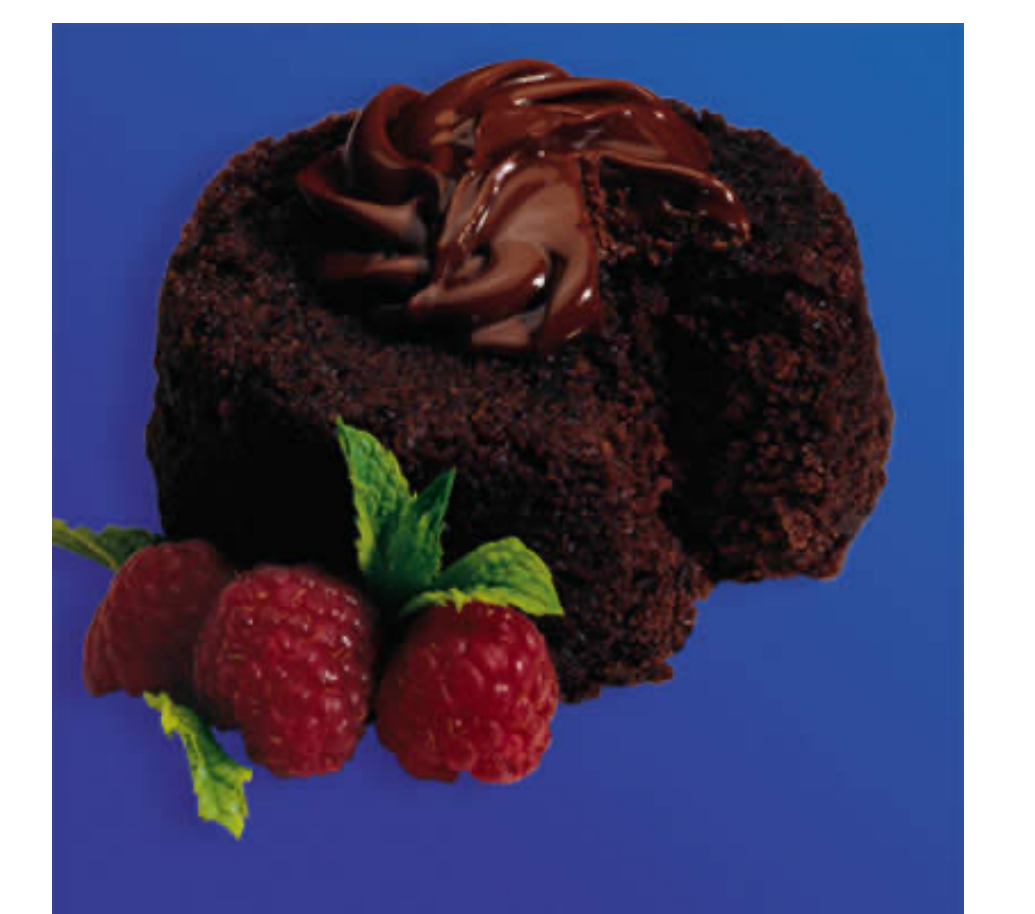


Fig. 1 Sample Jenny Craig Diet Weekly Plan

Fig. 2: Analysis of nutritional values in Figure 1