The singer Adele, and her significant slim down, has been credited to a combination of exercise and eating so-called “sirtfoods.” So what is the sirt diet -- and could it work for you? Let's take a look.

Adele’s significant slim down has been credited to a combination of exercise and eating “sirtfoods”. So what is the sirt diet and could it work for you?

COVID-19 may still be daily overwhelming the internet, but for a few hours last week all the talk on social mediturned to just how singer Adele could have lost so much weight.

And the answer? Apparently (allegedly) she’s been following the sirtfood diet [1], detailed in a book of the same name written by Aidan Goggins and Glen Matten.

The sirt in sirtfood stands for sirtuins – a group of genes and the proteins they encode that play a key role in cellular homeostasis. Sirtuins have been implicated in the stress response, DNA repair and energy metabolism, but the area where they’ve whipped up more scientific interest (and hype) than any other is in relation to extending lifespan.

The finding that sirtuins were linked to longevity in yeast led to an explosion of research that has yielded ambiguous results. There have been some signs of life extension and improved long-term health, including an anti-diabetic potential in laboratory animals, but nothing that’s been reliably shown to extend life in mammals.

The central tenet of the sirtfood diet is that eating certain polyphenol-rich foods – red wine and dark chocolate are frequently cited as examples to make the diet seem sexier – can stimulate
sirtuins (coined your “skinny genes” by the authors) and create weight loss.

Activating sirtuins through diet is an intriguing theory, but there’s little evidence to support it, and even less evidence that doing so would lead to significant weight loss in practice.

The diet promises a weight loss of 7 pounds in 7 days and that longer-term you will improve your resistance to disease while gaining “incredible energy and glowing health”.

If you don’t gnaw off your arm in hunger before you get slim that is.

“Phase one” of the diet is three miserable days of consuming just 1000 calories including three green juices, followed by four more days when you’re permitted 1500 calories but still have to gag on drink green juice.

“Phase two” lasts for two weeks and isn’t a whole lot more appealing, while longer-term you have to continue consuming the same list of foods repeatedly.

Polyphenol-rich food such as apples and citrus, green leafy vegetables, berries and olive oil are all perfectly healthy but having to focus on them at every meal is faddish and restrictive.

And that’s the real reason the sirt diet works for those that do stick to it – despite sounding seductively sciencey the restraints mean it’s just another not-particularly-well-disguised route to cutting calories.

If it works for you and it worked for Adele, then great. But let’s not pretend sirt diet success stories are down to anything other than eating less.