

## What is the ketogenic diet?

- This diet is a high-fat, low-carbohydrate (carb) diet
- Studies have found that a ketogenic diet can help reduce or prevent seizures in some people with epilepsy. We do not yet know the reason why this diet may help seizures. Scientists continue to study this diet to better understand how it works.
- Most of the time, the body uses sugar (glucose) for energy. These diets force the body to use fat for energy instead.
- This diet must be strictly followed. It is best to follow the diet for at least 3 months to see if it is helpful. If the diet is helping seizures, it may be used for 2 to 3 years.

Most of the calories on this diet will come from fat. A ketogenic diet meal may have:

- heavy cream to drink.
- a small portion of a protein food, like meat or eggs.
- a little bit of fruit or vegetable.
- a lot of fat, such as butter, mayonnaise and oil.

Very small portions of foods like breads, cereal and pasta may be able to be included.

Some things must be taken out of the diet. This includes desserts, candy and sweets, milk and juice. Instead, cream, water or other carbohydrate -free drinks are used. The dietitian will talk with you about ketogenic desserts and sweets.

For the diet to be most effective, it is important that your child eats **all** of each meal and snack. Creative recipes can help to make the diet easier to follow.

- All meals and snacks must be made according to recipes from the dietitian.
- All foods must be weighed on a digital scale.

Ketogenic formulas are available for infants and for use in feeding tubes.

## How is the diet started?

**Do not** start this diet at home. Your child will be admitted to the hospital for 3 to 4 days. The diet is slowly increased over that time. The dietitian will teach you about the diet. The Neurology team will monitor your child closely to make sure the diet is tolerated.

## Will medicines change after starting this diet?

Often, the diet is started along with all current medicines. Liquid or chewable medicines may need to be changed to a form with less carbohydrate. If the diet helps to improve seizures, medicines may change in the future.

## Are there any side effects of the diet?

Constipation is the most common side effect. The diet may also increase acid in the body. This is called acidosis. A less common effect is kidney stones. Drinking enough fluid and taking prescribed supplements will help to prevent these issues.

### Side effects continued

While on the ketogenic diet, food alone will not provide enough vitamins or minerals. Your child will need to take vitamin and mineral supplements. The healthcare provider will prescribe these.

Although this diet is high in fat, most children will not gain too much weight or get high cholesterol while on the diet.

### What follow-up care is needed while on this diet?

Routine visits in Neurology Clinic are needed. At each visit, the dietitian will look at growth and nutrition. Blood work will be done to see how the body is handling the diet. Changes will be made to the diet or medicines to get the best seizure control.

### Are there any other diets for epilepsy?

There is another diet called the Modified Atkins Diet (MAD). MAD may be good for your child if they eat by mouth and are older than 3 years of age. The ketogenic diet is best for those 2 years of age or younger and anyone with a feeding tube

### More resources on dietary therapies for epilepsy:

- Book: The Ketogenic and Modified Atkins Diets: Treatments for Epilepsy and Other Disorders by Dr. Eric Kossoff and team
- Website: [Charliefoundation.org](http://Charliefoundation.org) (English only)
- Website: [Epilepsy.com](http://Epilepsy.com) (English only) use the search feature to find information on MAD or ketogenic diets

### Other teaching sheets that may be helpful

- Modified Atkins Diet (MAD) for Epilepsy (#1750)

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

**This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.**