Should You Be on the Ketogenic Diet? The Pros and Cons of Limiting Carbs

There is a ton of hype surrounding the ketogenic diet. Some researchers swear that it is the best diet for most people to be on, while others can provide us with plenty of evidence that it is just another fad diet.

To some degree, both sides of the spectrum are right. There isn't one perfect diet for everyone or every condition, regardless of how many people "believe" in it. The ketogenic diet is no exception to this rule.

However, there is also plenty of solid research backing up its benefits. In fact, it has been found to be better than many diets at helping people with:

- Epilepsy
- Type 2 Diabetes
- Type 1 Diabetes
- High Blood Pressure
- Alzheimer's disease
- Parkinson's disease
- Chronic Inflammation
- Obesity
- Heart Disease
- Polycystic Ovary Syndrome
- Fatty Liver Disease
- Cancer
- Migraines

Even if you are not at risk from any of these conditions, restricting your carbohydrate consumption may be helpful for you too. Some of the benefits that most people experience are:

- Better brain function
- A decrease in inflammation
- An increase in energy
- Improved body composition

As you can see, the ketogenic diet has a wide array of benefits, but is it any better than other diets?

The Calorie Conundrum

Many researchers argue that ketosis (burning ketones for fuel) and carbohydrate restriction only play a minor role in the benefits of the ketogenic diet. Their argument is that people tend to eat fewer calories on the ketogenic diet, and this is the main reason for its benefits. The two most important selling points of the ketogenic diet, ketosis and carbohydrate restriction, may just be a red herring.

It is true that people on the ketogenic diet tend to eat less because of how satiating eating a high-fat moderate-protein diet like the ketogenic is for us. It is also true that less calorie consumption leads to improved health and weight loss. These two statements are backed up by plenty of research, but there is something that many researchers don’t consider.

The ketogenic diet elicits many mechanisms in the body and cells that are nonexistent in other diets. These unique mechanisms explain the benefits of the ketogenic diet that eating fewer calories cannot.

Related: ***Detox Cheap and Easy Without Fasting – Recipes Included***

What Restricting Carbohydrates Does to The Body

Frist, let’s see what happens inside of the cells in our body during the ketogenic diet:

- Ketones are produced, which burn more efficiently than sugar.
- Burning ketones creates much less reactive oxygen species than sugar, which decreases inflammation.
- Carbohydrate restriction triggers autophagy (cellular cleaning) and anti-inflammatory processes.
- Mitochondrial function and production are enhanced, making our cell's more efficient at using ketones and fat for fuel.

And here's what happens in the body on a larger scale:

- Insulin levels decrease because dietary carbohydrate isn't stimulating its release.
- Stored fat is burned because the body needs to use alternative fuel sources.
- Inflammation is reduced because inflammatory fat levels decrease and less reactive oxygen species are formed.

The combination of the cellular and bodily effects of the ketogenic diet provides us with a basis for why they may be more useful than other diets in the treatment of many of the conditions we mentioned earlier.

Who Would Benefit Most From The Ketogenic Diet?

There is convincing evidence supporting that the ketogenic diet can reduce the severity of epilepsy, type 2 diabetes, type 1 diabetes (especially if dairy is eliminated), Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, obesity, heart disease, polycystic ovary syndrome, fatty liver disease, migraines, and certain types of cancer. However, it is important to keep in mind that plant-based whole food diets are also useful in helping people with most of these issues as well.

The primary issues that the ketogenic diet may help with more

than a plant-based diet are probably neurological conditions like Parkinson’s, Alzheimer’s, and epilepsy. This is due to how efficient ketones are as a source of fuel for the brain. Some studies also indicate that ketogenic diet may be best for people with type 1 and type 2 diabetes and for people with certain types of cancer that cannot survive without sugar.

Who Shouldn’t Be On a Ketogenic Diet?

Although the ketogenic diet can help with a plethora of conditions, it can also deteriorate the health of others. For example, people with thyroid or adrenal issues and many women will struggle with carbohydrate restriction. This is because carbohydrates help regulate thyroid function, adrenal function, and fertility.

If you are already having issues with one or all of these things, then the limiting carbohydrates may make your health worse. This why it is important to have your lipid, blood sugar, and hormone levels checked before and during a profound dietary change like the ketogenic diet. Everything you do is an experiment on yourself. Just because someone else swears by a certain diet doesn’t mean it will work for you too.

The Takeaway – Should YOU be on the Ketogenic Diet?

Who would benefit the most from going keto? People who have:

- Epilepsy
- Parkinson’s disease
- Alzheimer’s disease
- Type 1 diabetes
- Type 2 diabetes
- Certain types of cancer that cannot survive without

sugar

Who shouldn’t restrict carbohydrate intake?

- People with adrenal issues
- People with thyroid issues
- Some women

So, what do you make of this information?

In general, eating more whole foods and less processed foods is what will give you the most bang for your buck. The simplest way to do this is by giving yourself an unbreakable rule like “eat less than 35 grams of carbs per day” (ketogenic diet) or “eliminate added sugar and limit animal product consumption” (plant-based diet). Both of these rules will help you consume more whole foods and less processed foods, which results in fewer calories consumed, less inflammation, less disease, and better health.

Choose whatever rule you think you can stick too and adjust your diet from there based on how your body reacts. It’s that simple. Well, at least it is that simple if you only care about your own health.

Recommended: ***The Way We Used To Eat – The Real Paleo Diet***

The Long-Term Effects of The Ketogenic Diet vs. a Plant-Based Diet

If you have some form of diabetes, a neurological issue, a carb-reliant form of cancer or want to lose weight rapidly, the ketogenic diet may be the best diet for you – at least for the short term (less than six months). Although many research studies have found that the ketogenic diet has no adverse long-term effects and is perfectly safe (for most of the people that were studied), we must consider the impact that

this diet has on the environment as well.

Animal products like meat, eggs, and dairy make up the bulk of calories on the ketogenic diets. These animal products are commonly sourced from controlled animal feeding operations that pollute the environment, destroy our soil, torture the animals, and produce nutritionally inferior food. With each purchase of mass-produced, unnaturally-raised animal products, we cast a vote for animal abuse, depleted soil that can't grow crops, and climate change.

This is why it is best to stick to the rule of "eat whole plant foods and eliminate processed foods" rather than "limit carbohydrates." If, however, you want to experiment with ketones or the ketogenic diet to see how it affects your health, keep reading below.

The Healthiest Way to Approach the Ketogenic Diet for You and The Environment

There are a couple of ways to get the benefits of the ketogenic diet while improving the environment.

Here's a brief list of some options:

- **Source your animal products from environmentally conscious farms and businesses.** If you are going to eat animal products, source them from U.S. Wellness Meats, White Oak Pastures, Polyface Farms, Vital Choice, and Udder Milk to get the healthiest animal products for you, the environment, and the animals.
- **Source all of your produce from local, biodynamic farms.** This cuts down on transportation costs and supports local farmers that work with the environment rather than against it.
- **Supplement your diet with ketone boosting supplements.**

Ketone salts and MCT oil will put your body into ketosis quickly and provide you will most of the benefits of the ketogenic diet. (I personally prefer MCT oil because it is easy to add to salads, sauces, and smoothies, and doesn't give me any weird side effects like ketone salts do.)

- **Include intermittent fasting in your daily schedule.** By skipping one or two meals a day or fasting for the whole day, you can activate many of the health-promoting mechanisms that are commonly experienced by ketogenic dieters.
- **Do a strict environmentally-friendly ketogenic diet for 6 to 12 weeks.** Think of the ketogenic diet as a short-term strategy to help improve specific health conditions. After about 6 to 12 weeks, your body will be keto-adapted and you'll be ready to slowly increase your carbohydrate consumption by eating more whole plant foods.
- **Try a vegan or vegetarian ketogenic diet for 6 to 12 weeks.** Eat plenty of low carb vegetables, coconut oil, olive oil, avocado, and nuts. Pasture-raised eggs are also an environmentally friendly option (if you are an ovo-vegetarian).

By following one or all of these strategies, you will experience the benefits of ketosis for yourself. The easiest way to do so is by combining intermittent fasting with MCT oil supplementation.

On the other hand, If you want to experience all of the effects of being keto-adapted, then it's best to do a strict ketogenic diet for 6 to 12 weeks. This is enough time to see if the ketogenic diet works for you.

Whether or not you decide to try these suggestions, it is important to keep one thing in mind – there is no magical diet that works for everyone. Nutrition is so complicated that gurus, researchers, and health professionals will argue about

it for centuries to come.

There is, however, one healthy eating rule that most people can agree on:

> *Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." – Michael Pollan*

Recommended Reading:

- *Start Eating Like That and Start Eating Like This – Your Guide to Homeostasis Through Diet*
- *How to Make the Healthiest Smoothies – 4 Recipes*
- *How to Detoxify and Heal the Lymphatic System*
- *Holistic Guide to Healing the Endocrine System and Balancing Our Hormones*

Sources:

- *A Comprehensive Beginner's Guide to the Ketogenic Diet* – Ruled.me
- *The neuroprotective properties of calorie restriction, the ketogenic diet, and ketone bodies* – Science Direct
- *The Ketogenic Diet as a Treatment Paradigm for Diverse Neurological Disorders* – NCBI
- *Short term improvement of migraine headaches during ketogenic diet: a prospective observational study in a dietician clinical setting* – NCBI
- *KETONES INHIBIT MITOCHONDRIAL PRODUCTION OF REACTIVE OXYGEN SPECIES PRODUCTION FOLLOWING GLUTAMATE EXCITOTOXICITY BY INCREASING NADH OXIDATION* – NCBI
- *Effects of beta-hydroxybutyrate on cognition in memory-impaired adults.* – NCBI
- *The therapeutic implications of ketone bodies: the effects of ketone bodies in pathological conditions: ketosis, ketogenic diet, redox states, insulin resistance, and mitochondrial metabolism.* – NCBI
- *A Ketogenic Diet Favorably Affects Serum Biomarkers for Cardiovascular Disease in Normal-Weight Men* – The

Journal of Nutrition
- *The Best Low Carb Vegetables for Keto* – Ruled.me
- *Short term improvement of migraine headaches during ketogenic diet: a prospective observational study in a dietician clinical setting* – NCBI
- *Long-term effects of a ketogenic diet in obese patients* – NCBI
- *Raised blood pressure* – WHO
- *Effect of orlistat-induced weight loss on blood pressure and heart rate in obese patients with hypertension.* – NCBI
- *Neuroprotective and disease-modifying effects of the ketogenic diet* – NCBI
- *Type 1 diabetes mellitus successfully managed with the paleolithic ketogenic diet* – Edorium Journals
- *Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS)* – Deep Dyve
- *Beyond weight loss: a review of the therapeutic uses of very-low-carbohydrate (ketogenic) diets.* – NCBI
- *The effects of a low-carbohydrate, ketogenic diet on the polycystic ovary syndrome: A pilot study*– BioMed Central
- *The effects of low carbohydrate diets on liver function tests in nonalcoholic fatty liver disease: A systematic review and meta-analysis of clinical trials* – NCBI
- *The Effect of a Low-Carbohydrate, Ketogenic Diet on Nonalcoholic Fatty Liver Disease: A Pilot Study* – Springer Link
- *A meta-analysis of randomized trials for the treatment of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease.* – NCBI
- *Effects of low-carbohydrate vs low-fat diets on weight loss and cardiovascular risk factors: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials.* – NCBI
- *Do Very Low-Carb Diets Mess Up Some Women's Hormones?* – Authority Nutrition
- *Effects of a ketogenic diet during pregnancy on embryonic growth in the mouse* – NCBI
- *Dietary Reference Intakes: Macronutrients* – National Academies

- *Maternal consumption of a high-meat, low-carbohydrate diet in late pregnancy: relation to adult cortisol concentrations in the offspring* – NCBI
- *Dietary Intervention for Overweight and Obese Adults: Comparison of Low-Carbohydrate and Low-Fat Diets. A Meta-Analysis* – PLOS
- *Low-carb diet: Can it help you lose weight?* – Mayo Clinic
- *Is a Low-Carb Diet Ruining Your Health?* – Chris Kresser
- *The Dangers of Fat Metabolism and PUFA: WhyYou Don't Want to be a Fat Burner* – Journal of Evolution and Health
- *Insulin's impact on renal sodium transport and blood pressure in health, obesity, and diabetes* – American Journal of Physiology
- *Metabolic characteristics of keto-adapted ultra-endurance runners* – Metabolism
- *Long-term effects of a ketogenic diet in obese patients* – NCBI
- *Long term effects of ketogenic diet in obese subjects with high cholesterol level.* – NCBI
- *The Effects of a Ketogenic Diet on Exercise Metabolism and Physical Performance in Off-Road Cyclists* – NCBI
- *The Ketogenic Diet: An Effective Medical Therapy With Side Effects* – Sage Journals
- *The Physiology of Stress: Cortisol and the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal Axis* – Dartmouth
- *The Ketogenic Diet Is Well Tolerated and Can Be Effective in Patients with Argininosuccinate Lyase Deficiency and Refractory Epilepsy* – NCBI
- *Effects of Dietary Composition on Energy Expenditure During Weight-Loss Maintenance* – JAMA
- *The metabolic effects of low-carbohydrate diets and incorporation into a biochemistry course* – Wiley Online Library
- *Beyond weight loss: a review of the therapeutic uses of very-low-carbohydrate (ketogenic) diets* – Nature

- *Long-term effects of a very-low-carbohydrate weight-loss diet and an isocaloric low-fat diet on bone health in obese adults* – Nutrition
- *Weight and Metabolic Outcomes After 2 Years on a Low-Carbohydrate Versus Low-Fat Diet: A Randomized Trial* – Annals of Internal Medicine
- *Mechanisms of Ketogenic Diet Action* – NCBI
- *Mechanism of Action and Physiologic Effects of Thyroid Hormones* – Colorado State University
- *Functional hypothalamic amenorrhea and its influence on women's health* – NCBI
- *The effects of a low-carbohydrate, ketogenic diet on the polycystic ovary syndrome: A pilot study* – NCBI
- *Effect of a low-carbohydrate diet on appetite, blood glucose levels, and insulin resistance in obese patients with type 2 diabetes.* – NCBI
- *Understanding a High-Fat Ketogenic Diet—and is it Right for You?* – goop