What is epilepsy diet therapy?

In 1921, the first diet to manage seizures was created. It was called the Ketogenic diet. The classic Ketogenic diet was first applied to manage diabetes before there was insulin. Ketogenic diets limit the foods and drinks with carbohydrates. Your body will burn fat to make energy if there is no glucose available. When fat is burned without carbohydrates, it releases chemicals into your blood. These chemicals are called ketones. After a few days eating limited carbohydrates, you will be able to measure the ketones in your urine. This diet requires close follow-up with a specially trained dietitian and medical team. Fat makes up 80-90% of the diet.

Types of ketogenic diets

The Epilepsy center at the Providence Brain and Spine Institute together with Providence Outpatient Nutritional Services offers the modified ketogenic diet as a therapy for our adult patients with epilepsy. The major differentiating factor between them all is the amount of calories that come from protein, carbs, and fat.

- Classic Ketogenic Diet
- Modified Ketogenic Diet
- Modified Atkins Diet
- Low Glycemic Index Diet (LGIT)
- + More

Modified ketogenic diet

Classic ketogenic diets are challenging to follow. As a result, additional modified ketogenic diets have been created. Providence outpatient nutrition offers a modified ketogenic diet that allows some carbohydrates to round out the diet nutritionally. This diet is high in fat and protein. You are not limited in the amount of fluids you can drink. Understanding how to count carbohydrates and portion size is important. The modified ketogenic diet limits carbohydrates to 20 grams per day.
How successful is diet therapy for epilepsy?

About half of the patients that try the modified ketogenic diet find that their seizures decrease by more than half. Most patients will know in the first 2-4 weeks if the diet is going to help reduce seizures. Since you may not be having seizures that often now, we ask that you try the diet for at least 3-6 months. If you stop the diet, you will need to do this slowly and be safe.

What are the challenges for the diet?

Following the diet to reduce seizures requires a commitment. Ask yourself if this is financially feasible as fats and protein make up the main food groups. If you have many food allergies, this might limit what you can eat. You will still be able to eat meals with family and friends. You should be able to eat out at restaurants, although this may take more planning in the beginning to understand what you can eat (this is a special diet for your epilepsy, this diet is not suited to others. Other family members should not follow your diet pattern). Talking to a dietitian will help you to understand what you will be able to eat and manage the ups and downs of following this diet. You will need to:

- Plan and organize a daily menu for yourself
- Plan for groceries
- Plan for food preparation
- Plan for special events

Is this diet healthy for me?

The diet alone does not contain enough vitamins or minerals. A nutritional deficiency could develop without supplements. Generally multivitamin, calcium and Vitamin D are recommended while on the modified ketogenic diet. Blood work will be monitored before and during the diet.

What will happen with my weight?

Weight loss can happen. Your dietitian will work with you to be at an appropriate weight for your height. We want you to maintain a healthy weight.

Getting Started

If you are interested in starting the modified ketogenic diet, please discuss with your epilepsy specialist. Your doctor will want to review your other medical conditions first.

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