

Dietary Therapies to Treat Seizures and Epilepsy



Dietary therapies can help control various types of seizures when medicines alone don't work. There are a few different dietary therapies used today. They are all low in carbohydrates (like sugar, pasta, and bread) and high in fat.

If you are considering a dietary therapy for yourself or your child, talk with your treatment team. You may also want to talk with other people who have been on the diet.

Most people also keep taking seizure medicine while on a dietary therapy.

Ketogenic Diet

The ketogenic diet is the oldest of the dietary therapies. It works by changing how your body gets energy from food. Normally, the body uses carbohydrates for energy. With this diet, your body uses fat instead (this is called "ketosis").

The diet is very high in fat, it's low in protein (meat) and carbohydrates, and it limits the amount of total calories and liquids you can have.

Doctors usually recommend this diet for children. It's rarely prescribed for teens and adults because it's hard to follow.

To start the diet, you will need to see a nutritionist to get a personalized food plan. Then you will need to fast (not eating anything) for 24 hours. Most people do this in the hospital.

Dietary therapy for seizures isn't like a weight-loss diet — you can't just do it on your own. Your medical team will help you plan and make sure it's going okay.

What's it like to be on the diet?

- You'll need to carefully weigh and measure all your food because it's very important to follow the diet exactly — every day, for every meal.
- You'll also need to check the ingredients in things like toothpaste and medicines that may contain sugar.
- You may need to take a vitamin supplement.
- You may feel tired for a few days after starting the diet.

What are the side effects?

- Side effects may include dehydration, constipation, kidney stones, and high cholesterol. You'll need to get blood and urine tests regularly to check for problems.
- Children on the ketogenic diet may grow more slowly than other children. The doctor will measure height and weight to see how your child is developing.

How well does it work?

Many people who try the ketogenic diet have fewer seizures. For about 1 in 2 people, the diet reduces their seizures by half — and 3 in 20 become seizure-free.

When and how can I stop the diet?

- Some people stay on the ketogenic diet for many years, while others stop after a few years if their seizures are well controlled.
- To stop the diet, your doctor and nutritionist will make a plan to help you stop slowly over several months. Stopping suddenly can make seizures worse.

“ We don’t yet know exactly why diets that burn fat for energy prevent seizures, or why they work for some people and not for others. ”



Other Dietary Therapies

There are 2 other dietary therapies that are easier to follow than the ketogenic diet.

- On the **modified Atkins diet**, you only need to limit the carbohydrates you eat. This means you can eat a wide variety of foods.
- With the **Low Glycemic Index Treatment (LGIT)**, you limit total carbohydrates and avoid foods with a high glycemic index (foods that raise your blood sugar a lot).

With either of these diets:

- You don’t need to weigh your food — you can just measure portion sizes.
- There are no limits on protein, liquids, or total calories.
- You still may need to take a vitamin supplement.
- You may have side effects like weight loss or high cholesterol. Your doctor will check your blood, urine, and weight to look for problems.

Remember, it’s important to consult a neurologist or epileptologist before you start any special diet for seizures and epilepsy.

At least 1 in 2 people who try either the modified Atkins diet or the LGIT will have fewer seizures.

Learn more about treatments for epilepsy and seizures at www.epilepsy.com/treatment.

Disclaimer: This publication is designed to provide general information about epilepsy and seizures to the public. It is not intended as medical advice. People with epilepsy should not make changes to treatment or activities based on this information without first consulting their health care provider.

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