

DANGERS OF THE KETO DIET



The ketogenic diet has been around for decades; however, it is not without its risks. One of them being that there is a lot of misinformation surrounding the keto diet.

While there are many benefits for following a keto lifestyle, there are also some dangers that need to be taken into consideration before starting a keto regimen. It is important to have realistic expectations before starting anything new, especially something as drastic as changing what you eat every day.

The keto diet is basically an extremely-low carb diet that can help you lose weight quickly—but there are other effects on your body that may not appeal to you.

A typical keto diet is made up of mostly fat, some protein and a very small amount of carbohydrates. Carbohydrates provide the main form of energy that the body requires, in the form of glucose. With such a low intake of carbohydrates and glucose the body begins to use stored up glucose, in the form of glycogen in the liver and muscles. This is the body's immediate store of energy that it can call upon. Once all the glycogen stores are used up, the body then uses stored fat for energy, which is why the keto diet is popular for weight loss.

This is called ketosis, which is the process of using ketones for energy. Ketosis is natural and extremely effective at burning fat quickly but there are many things that can go wrong on the keto diet.

Susceptibility to illness and disease

One of the first dangers of a keto diet is that a large proportion of healthy carbohydrates such as fruits and vegetables are not allowed. This cuts out a large amount of your daily intake of vitamins, minerals and fibre. You need vitamins and minerals for every single function in the body. If you do not eat fruits and vegetables you will have reduced immunity and get ill more often. You will then struggle to fight off that illness. Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables also prevents heart disease, cancer, diabetes and high blood pressure. For this reason, it is best to think about all round health, not just weight loss (1). Vegetables permitted on a keto diet are those grown above ground. These include broccoli, kale, spinach, asparagus, sprouts and cauliflower.

Constipation

Without fruit and vegetables, you are also missing out on fibre. There is no fibre in meat or dairy products. Fibre is needed to keep your gut bacteria healthy, which is linked to good mental health as well as immunity. It also keeps your digestion moving and stops you getting constipated. At best constipation is uncomfortable, at worst it is extremely painful. One way to overcome constipation is to drink plenty of water, or there are medications available. But the best way is to eat fibrous fruits and vegetables. (2)

Keto diets rely heavily on dairy products such as cheese and cream, meats, including bacon and sausages, poultry and game. The danger is that high-fat foods, eaten regularly on the keto diet, are often high in saturated fat and cholesterol. Long term, this can lead to killer diseases such as cancer and

heart disease due to clogged arteries (3). Is it really worth killing yourself just to be slim? It is important not to follow a strict keto diet for too long and to keep an eye on the fat levels in your blood.

If budget allows buy meat from organically raised, grass-fed animals. This meat is higher quality and contains omega 3 fat which is good for our health. Meat from animals raised inside and fed grain instead of grass contains anti-biotics and hormones. These have been given to the animals and find their way into meat and milk. These can then have a harmful effect on human health (4). Try and avoid processed meats such as sausages, bacon, corned beef, chicken nuggets and cold cuts. These are high in salt and preservatives. They have also been linked with causing health issues such as cancer. (5)

Keto Flu

A common danger with this way of eating is keto flu. The symptoms most usually reported feel like actual flu - headache, fatigue and nausea. Other symptoms are muscle weakness, achiness and cramp; panic, anxiety, depression, acne, diarrhoea, constipation and an overall feeling of being run down. The reason for experiencing keto flu is that the body is having to change from using glucose for energy to ketones. The process of adapting causes the symptoms (6).

Those promoting the keto diet suggest that if you experience these symptoms it is important to drink plenty of water and rest until they clear up. This is true but adapting to using ketones, when you have used glucose for years, can take several weeks (7).

Dehydration

As mentioned ketones are used for energy on the keto diet. On a standard diet excess glucose can be stored, however, ketones cannot be stored. The body needs to get rid of them and they are excreted in the urine. Due to this you need to go pee much more often on a keto diet and this can lead to lack of water in the body, called dehydration. Dehydration causes weakness, headaches and irritability. A sure sign of dehydration is thirst so it is best to listen to your body and drink plenty of water (8).

Kidney Stones

A painful danger of the keto diet is kidney stones, although you may feel it is worth the risk as it only seems to affect around 8% of adults, which increases with age (9). If left untreated kidney stones can lead to kidney damage which can have irreversible consequences (10).

Diarrhoea

On the opposite side of constipation is diarrhoea which can also be caused by the keto diet. The keto diet is high in fat. When we eat fat, the liver produces bile to help break that fat down. On a normal diet the effect of bile is not noticed, however, eating excess fat causes an excess of bile. This can give us diarrhoea because bile is a laxative (11).

When you have diarrhoea, the food is not broken down properly because it moves through the gut too fast. As well as being uncomfortable, it can be downright embarrassing. If the food is moving through the digestive system too fast the nutrients you are eating are not absorbed into the body. Short term this shouldn't be a problem; but long term this can lead to dehydration and other health issues (12).

Bad Breath

Another embarrassing side effect of the keto diet is halitosis. As such it is not really a danger but be warned - you may lose friends! The good news is that it only lasts a couple of weeks as your body adjust to burning fat instead of carbohydrates. The best way to overcome it is to drink plenty of water and make sure your keep up with your oral hygiene (13).

Weight Gain

Many people who follow keto diets do so for weight loss. However, obesity is actually one of the negative side effects associated with this type of diet. Obesity is dangerous as it is linked to many chronic health issues such as heart disease and cancer. The reason behind this is that when we eat lots of saturated fats our livers get overloaded and they start converting any extra calories into fat instead of using other available energy sources. Fat contains more calories per gram than carbohydrates and so as with any diet it is important to not take in too many calories (14).

Diabetes

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Poor Mental Health

Finally, a significant danger of a high fat diet is an increase in stress, anxiety and depression. Fat is inflammatory and the effect of this on the brain, long term, causes these debilitating mental health states.

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