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The Keto Diet

There are so many diet books available and new ones keep appearing. We have the *Eat Fat, Get Thin Diet*, *The Plant Paradox*, *Master Cleanse Diet*, the *Flat Belly Diet*, *The 20/20 Diet*, the *Metabolism Reset Diet*, the *Setpoint Diet*, and many others.

People get tired of diets that leave them feeling and looking no better than they were before the diet. The low-carb craze started in the 1970s with the Atkins diet. Then came the South Beach diet, and now the Keto (or Ketogenic) diet. Typically, in these low-carb diets, fat comprises 70–80 percent, proteins 10–20 percent, and carbs only 5–10 percent of the calories. When the body is starved of carbs, the liver produces ketones as an alternate fuel from stored fat. Hence, the name keto diet.

Is a low-carb diet the most effective for losing weight? Persons following low-carb diets experience a greater weight loss over a six-month period but, after 12 months, there is no significant difference from conventional low-fat, low-calorie diets.

Why does a low-carb diet work more effectively in the short term? Low-carb diets are high in protein and fat which have a stronger satiating effect than carbohydrate. When you eliminate most carbs (rice, bread, cereals, pasta, potatoes), it gives a monotonous diet. Restricting food choices limits the intake of calories considerably.

The success of the ketogenic diet to promote weight loss also may be due to the hunger-reducing effect of ketone bodies; a decreased level of insulin, an appetite-stimulating hormone; or the increased calorie expenditure due to the metabolic effects of converting fat and protein to glucose. Carbohydrate restriction causes glycogen depletion, so that the early weight loss may be due to loss of water rather than fat. A main

criticism of this diet is that many people tend to eat too much protein and poor-quality fats, with very few fruits and vegetables.

Typically, low-carb diets provide favorable changes in blood triglycerides and HDL levels, while LDL levels increase in the long-term. A multi-vitamin supplement may be necessary to prevent nutrient deficiencies. Low-carb diets tend to be low in potassium, magnesium, folic acid, and other B vitamins, as well as fiber. Those who consume low-carb diets often complain of bad breath, constipation, headaches, muscle cramps, irritability, lack of concentration, and fatigue. The possibility of unpleasant symptoms may make compliance difficult. Staying satisfied with a limited variety of foods also may be challenging.

Research on the ketogenic diet is quite limited with studies being short-term. All the long-term risks of using a low-carb diet are largely unknown at this time. There is an increased risk of kidney stones and gout. Eating too much saturated fat will have an adverse effect on LDL cholesterol levels.

Studies show that people who lose weight and have successfully kept it off long-term typically eat a diet rich in fiber and complex carbohydrates, and less fat than the average American. Bulky fiber-rich meals increase feelings of fullness, and delay hunger. More fruit and vegetables in the diet will help one manage their weight long-term more effectively. ■



▲ Winston Craig

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