



Factsheet:

The Ketogenic Diet

What is it?

The ketogenic diet is a special diet used to treat children who have epilepsy that does not respond to anti-epileptic drugs (intractable epilepsy). More and more parents and medical professionals are now considering this diet as a treatment. Repeated studies have shown that the Ketogenic diet can reduce seizures in up to 60% in children whose epilepsy is drug resistant. For these children, a third will have a 50% reduction in seizures, and a third will have a 90% reduction in seizures or become completely seizure free. However, for the remainder the diet will have no positive effect.

How does it work?

The diet basically mimics starvation. Our bodies need carbohydrates for energy and because the diet is very low in carbohydrates, the body has to burn fat for energy. During this process, ketones are produced. For some reason this state of 'ketosis' can have a positive effect on seizure control. It is still not fully understood why this is, but it can be very effective for some children. Simple urine tests are usually done to monitor the amount of ketones in the body.

What is the diet like?

The diet is very restricted and all the ingredients must be carefully weighed. It is very high in fat, has just enough protein and is very low in carbohydrates. It can only be prescribed by a qualified dietician trained in working with the ketogenic diet. Throughout this process your child will also need to be carefully monitored by medical staff for adverse health effects.

Parents and medical professionals often consider this diet as a last resort because it can be quite a daunting prospect at first. Dietary treatments have, however, greatly improved over the past few years, and they are becoming easier for families to manage. There's also a choice of diets. Parents are often keen to try this treatment because if the diet proves successful, it means that drugs can be weaned down or weaned off completely in some cases.

Please, never try this diet without medical helps as it could be dangerous for your child. If you want to find a qualified ketogenic dietician in Scotland contact the charity Matthews Friends on 0788 405481 for details of your nearest Ketogenic Diet clinic. Your child will usually need a referral by their neurologist or paediatrician to one of these clinics.

How long does the treatment last?

The diet is not for life. Usually the children are only on the diet for a maximum of two years and can then be weaned off. The positive effects from the diet will remain for the vast majority of children. The diet can be given for longer if necessary.

Can an adult go on the diet?

The ketogenic diet is not recommended for adults. If your child is older, you may be interested to know that there is currently some work going on in the USA using the Modified Atkins Diet and Low Glycemic Index Treatment for adults with drug resistant epilepsy. A limited number of adults are now using these more liberal dietary treatments here in the UK. More studies into the use of these diets with adults is currently underway.

If you are curious and want to find out more about this diet, the charity Matthews Friends – Dietary Treatments for Epilepsy are a fantastic source of information including support, recipe ideas and updates on new developments. They can usually tell you about resources in your area and how to access them. Contact them on 0788 4054811, or have a look at their website, www.matthewsfriends.org, which is full of detailed information on all the diets available for both children and adults.

For more help and information

Call our helpline 0808 800 2200, text 07786 209 501

Or email us at enquiries@epilepsycotland.org.uk