

Dietary treatments for adults

With ketogenic therapy for children (please see our separate factsheet on the 'Ketogenic Diet') becoming more known and accepted by medical professionals, attention has now turned to improving the availability of this option for adults. As these dietary regimes have become more liberal, the ketogenic therapy has become more practical and accessible to both adults and children.

The most commonly used dietary therapy for adults is a modified version of the popular Atkins diet, used by many for weight loss. This is called the **Modified Atkins or Modified Ketogenic Diet**. Another diet used for adults is the **Low Glycaemic Index Treatment**. For adults requiring tube feeding, the dietary therapy used tends to be based on the classical ketogenic approach.

How do they work?

All dietary treatments for epilepsy work in a similar way, ie they all are much lower in carbohydrate and much higher in fats than a regular balanced diet. With very low carbohydrates in the diet, the body turns to fat for energy. The liver makes ketones from fat and these become alternative fuel for the brain. The presence of these ketones and the greater stability of blood glucose levels somehow can help with seizure control, but we do not understand entirely how this works.

Possible benefits

A number of smaller scale studies have shown that around half the adults report a 50% or greater reduction in seizures.

Other benefits have also been reported anecdotally such as a better quality of life, increased energy, improved clarity of thought and a better ability to make decisions. Over a period of time, this can lead to an increased sense of empowerment and wellbeing. In some cases this can be significant. Generally, it takes around three months to determine whether these modified therapies will have a positive effect on

seizure control and general wellbeing or not. If there is a positive reaction to these diets, a neurologist may consider weaning you off one of your anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs), which could mean even more benefits due to fewer side effects.

Possible side effects

During the first week of the dietary treatment, people often report feeling tired and having a mild headache. This usually happens when the energy switch from carbohydrates to fat occurs. The most common ongoing side effect is constipation, which can often be managed by some adjustment to the diet or the use of laxatives if necessary. An additional beneficial effect, especially for those struggling with weight gain, is that these diets can lead to successful weight loss. This can be a welcome side effect as some of the AEDs can cause the opposite side effect resulting in people gaining weight.

The dietary treatment may lead to a temporary increase in cholesterol levels and can increase the risk of kidney stones in those taking certain AEDs. Anyone, children and adults, considering any of these dietary treatments, should be medically screened first to find out if they are suitable. This will involve taking blood tests before the diet is started and then repeated regularly throughout. It is important that any adult on these restrictive diets is monitored carefully and regularly by a specialist ketogenic team (which usually is a ketogenic dietitian and neurologist).

How long for?

When effective, adults stay on their ketogenic diet for two years or more. It is recommended that a diet 'wean' is tried after approximately two years. At the moment, there is not enough experience of long term adult treatment and weaning. This makes it difficult to say whether any beneficial effects of the diet will last even after the adult has returned to a normal balanced diet.

Help and support in the UK

Currently, there are only a few adults on these diets in the UK. This is primarily due to a lack of specialist support and specialist medical advice on these diets. If you want to explore the possibility of trying this dietary approach, speak to your consultant first, who may then refer you to a specialist ketogenic centre.

Alternatively, you can be referred to the [Matthews Friends Clinics](#) for Dietary Treatment, based at Lingfield in Surrey. The clinic has an experienced team of doctors and dietitians on hand to support and supervise your dietary treatment.

A referral by your consultant will usually mean that your health board will fund this treatment. Otherwise, you may need to pay for the cost of your treatment yourself.

Further information on all dietary therapies for epilepsy

For more information on all of these dietary therapies and access to specialist support in the UK, contact Matthews Friends on 01342 836 571, or have a look at their website, www.matthewsfriends.org.

You can also find information on the Modified Atkins Diet on the American website Atkins for Seizures <http://www.atkinsforseizures.com/>