

Treating epilepsy with a keto diet

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A very low-carb diet can make a big difference for children who don't respond well to other epilepsy treatments. The UK Epilepsy Clinic works to show families how to use the ketogenic (keto) diet to reduce and even eliminate seizures.

What is the keto diet?

The [keto diet](#) is often touted as a weight-loss method, but it's really a medical diet that's been used to treat epilepsy since the 1920s. The keto diet is essentially a [strict diet](#) that mimics the effects of fasting. Keto requires you to cut out most carbohydrates and sugars while eating more fats and limited proteins. The name comes from a process called ketosis, which occurs when someone fasts and the body starts burning fat instead of carbs. Keto also works well for adults with difficult-to-treat epilepsy with medications.

How does the keto diet work?

Typically, your body uses carbs and sugar for energy. But cutting out most carbs forces the body to burn stored fat for energy. Researchers aren't exactly sure how the keto diet works. It may lower the "excitability" of the brain, which reduces seizures.

If it's followed carefully, the keto diet works for children whose epilepsy is difficult to treat:

- 7% of children become seizure-free
- 20% of children have a 90% reduction in seizures
- 50% of [children](#) have a 50% reduction in seizures

Clinical trials are also underway studying how the keto diet might be used to treat malignant glioma, Alzheimer's disease, migraine, motor neuron disease and other conditions.

The keto diet can cause low glucose levels early on, so it's important to work with a physician and dietitian before you or your child try the diet. Patient families at UK HealthCare meet with a dietitian and me either in

person or via telehealth before embarking on the keto plan, but ongoing monitoring can be done at satellite clinics throughout Kentucky to save [travel time](#) and costs.

Provided by University of Kentucky

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