

Keto Diet for Beginners

Dropping a few, or many, pounds is an appealing proposition for most of us.

Many are drawn to ketogenic or keto diet based on promises of fast weight loss. But finding success with keto requires the right approach as you start.

The basic idea of the keto diet for beginners is simple. It takes our basic notions about carbohydrate, protein and fat intake and [flips them upside down](#), limiting carbohydrate intake to as little as five percent, protein intake to 20 percent and expanding caloric fat intake as high as 75 percent (of our daily intake). The theory is that this [sends your body into ketosis](#), in which your body breaks down fat (rather than carbohydrates) and converts them into ketones to provide energy.

To start, swap high carbs for low carbs



Between cookbooks and websites, you have likely already seen many of the suggestions for changing up your routine to make it more keto-friendly. In general, taking high-carbohydrate items and swap them out for low-carbohydrate alternatives.

For example, you can replace rice with cauliflower rice or more vegetables, or use lettuce wraps instead of bread, buns and tortilla. For snacks, things like plain yogurt, nuts, cheese, and hard-boiled eggs make great choices.

Many foods are naturally keto-friendly, such as lean proteins and meats, fish and nut butters, says Nicole Rittman, RD, LDN, a clinical dietitian at the University of Miami Health System.

Beware - but get through - the keto flu

During the first several days of the keto diet, many people experience what has been coined the '[keto flu](#)' according to Rittman. "The 'keto flu' can consist of headaches, fatigue, dizziness, irritability and possible gastrointestinal symptoms."

These symptoms are the result of "carbohydrate withdrawal" as your body transitions to using ketones as fuel rather than glucose. For many, it takes a few days to shake the feeling. Once it subsides, you should begin to feel more like yourself again, she says.

The backup problem

When starting keto, consider its impact on your digestive tract, says Rittman. Put simply, replacing most of the carbohydrates in the diet with fats significantly reduces fiber intake. For many, this can lead to constipation.

You can combat these effects by drinking plenty of water throughout the day. "Adequate fluid intake may help lessen the development of constipation," Rittman says. "People may also find they are eating more than their usual intake of protein when first adopting the keto diet. To assist the body process this extra protein, they would benefit from drinking more fluids throughout the day, as well."

Focusing your daily quota of carbohydrates on high-fiber foods, rather than simple sources of sugar, can help prevent constipation. “The diet allows for small quantities of carbohydrates, so I recommend taking advantage of ones that are also high in fiber,” says Rittman. “Examples include fruits, avocados and low-carbohydrate vegetables like spinach, collard greens, broccoli and asparagus.”

Success in sustainability

Beginners on the keto diet need to decide if it’s right for you. “Not every diet is going to be appropriate for everyone,” says Rittman. “I always recommend discussing with a registered dietitian or health professional prior to starting a diet to determine if it is right for you.”

Certain people may want to steer clear of the keto diet altogether for medical reasons.

“The ketogenic diet may not be appropriate with people who have Crohn’s disease or ulcerative colitis, or conditions related to the liver, pancreas or kidneys,” Rittman says. “Given the extent of its restrictions, I would also recommend caution to people experiencing unintentional weight loss or difficulty maintaining their weight.”

While keto can be helpful for some, the jury is still out on its long-term benefits. More research is needed in this area, Rittman says. She also has concerns about limitations of the diet and recommends multivitamins to replace nutrients that people may not get when changing what they eat.

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