



Keto 101

THE BENEFITS, RISKS, AND STRATEGIES
FOR THE WILDLY POPULAR DIET

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BAKED GOODS FOR THE SOUL

Keto 101: The Benefits, Risks, and Strategies for the Wildly Popular Diet

Search the word “keto” on Google and you are immediately presented with a staggering 200 million results. The term has become nearly ubiquitous over the last few years as the keto diet trend has taken off. But what exactly does it mean?

For starters, keto is short for the ketogenic diet, a popular eating plan that has won millions of converts — and a fair share of detractors. A keto diet severely restricts the number of carbohydrates, while emphasizing a high-fat and moderate protein menu. Due to a limited quantity of glucose (sugar) available to be converted into energy, the diet sends the body into a state of ketosis, during which the liver produces ketone bodies, molecules that turn stored fat into fuel.

Keto by the Numbers

A keto diet is extremely demanding, typically limiting the intake of carbohydrates — the source of your body’s glucose supply — to no more than 10 percent of your daily calories. That translates to a range of 20 to 50 grams a day, depending on the person’s size. When you consider the average amount of carbs in common foods — an apple has about 25 grams, a potato has almost 40 grams, and bagel has nearly 50 grams — you realize how restrictive (and challenging) a keto diet can be. A dieter would have to think twice about most snacks: A single serving of national brand potato chips has about 15 grams of carbs.

On the other hand, the dieter has almost no limitations on fat intake, which can account for about 70 percent of daily calories. (Protein makes up the remaining 20 percent.) Consequently, many keto adherents will gleefully consume high quantities of foods high in saturated fats like red meat, bacon, cheese, and butter, which can raise cholesterol levels and increase the risk of heart disease, stroke and other ailments. (Another concern: The diet limits the number of fruits and vegetables one can consume — due to their high levels of carbohydrates — which can lead to significant nutrient deficiencies.)



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But if followed properly, the diet does provide a body in ketosis the fuel it needs. And, according to a [report](#) from the Harvard University School of Public Health's nutrition department, "the ketogenic diet has been shown to produce beneficial metabolic changes in the short-term. Along with weight loss, health parameters associated with carrying excess weight have improved, such as insulin resistance, high blood pressure, and elevated cholesterol and triglycerides." In addition, the diet can lead to reduced cravings and a decrease in appetite, which also obviously help weight loss.



Health experts have expressed concerns that some dieters are not properly adhering to the plan's strict guidelines and assuming they can occasionally "cheat" by consuming extra carbs. This undermines the effectiveness of the diet and can be unhealthy. Because a keto diet can be so restrictive, it's not considered a viable long-term strategy. (As with any diet, it is essential to consult with a doctor before beginning a new eating plan.)

One interesting — and perhaps unexpected — note about a keto diet is that it has been shown to be an effective treatment for [epilepsy](#), a neurological disorder that causes seizures and other health problems. And a [2020 report](#) in the International Journal of Neuropsychopharmacology found that "induced ketosis (or ketone body ingestion) can ameliorate several changes associated with neuroprogressive disorders, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and major depressive disorder."

Making Keto Healthier

While many nutritionists do not recommend a keto diet, there are ways to create healthier menu options. It's best to stick to foods that contain unsaturated fats, which "improves blood cholesterol levels, which can decrease your risk of heart disease and may also help decrease the risk of type 2 diabetes," according to the [Mayo Clinic](#). Excellent sources of unsaturated fats include seeds and nuts, peanut butter, avocados, olive oil, and certain fish, like salmon and tuna.

The carbohydrate part of the equation is, obviously, much more difficult to optimize. Whenever possible, dieters should look for foods that are high in fiber, which will help lower blood cholesterol and give a feeling of fullness. Some good sources of fiber-rich foods are raspberries, artichokes, and beans — though even in small quantities these foods will quickly put a keto dieter up against their daily carb limit.



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Satisfying a Sweet Tooth

Of course, one of the biggest sacrifices that comes with any diet is giving up sweets. And while keto is obviously no exception, there are a vast assortment of desserts and baked goods that can help satisfy one's sweet tooth and remain within the guidelines of the diet. Low or no calorie sweeteners help give snack foods an authentic taste, while still being keto friendly.



[Sugar alcohols](#) are among the most common sweeteners in keto desserts. Though they are carbohydrates, they contain fewer calories than traditional sweeteners like sucrose. Popular types of sugar alcohols include sorbitol, xylitol, erythritol, and mannitol, all of which are sweeter than common sugars, but with significantly fewer calories. Other sweeteners used in keto products include monk fruit extract, stevia, allulose, and aspartame, which have low (or zero) calories but provide a rich, sweet taste.

Because foods sweetened with sugar alcohols and other sugar substitutes contain carbohydrates, they must still be consumed in moderation. But it's clear that these type of snacks and desserts have helped make keto a much more attainable diet.

The Business of Keto

Keto's explosive popularity has created a burgeoning sector of the diet and food industries. According to one [report](#), "the rising prevalence of overweight and obesity problems among the young generation, millennials, and the working-class population is fueling market growth." The researchers calculate that the market size was valued at more than US \$9 billion in 2019 and is forecast to reach nearly US \$15 billion by 2027.



Among the keto products that have become more popular in recent years are supplements, condiments, sauces, cereals, yogurts, and even pizza crusts. Not surprisingly, a major portion of the market is snack foods, including a wide variety of chips, cookies, ice cream, and snack bars. These treats often feature low-sugar sweeteners (see above) and are typically high in fiber and plant-based protein. Many are gluten free and vegan.

As keto dieting proves to be more than just a passing fad, expect the market to diversify with increasingly creative options to start appearing in stores.

Key Takeaways

- The keto diet, short for ketogenic, is a popular eating plan that has millions of converts. The diet severely restricts carbohydrates while emphasizing a high-fat, moderate protein menu.
- To optimize a healthy keto diet, it's ideal one sticks to foods that contain unsaturated fats, which help improve blood cholesterol levels, can decrease the risk of heart disease and may also help decrease the risk of type 2 diabetes. Excellent sources of unsaturated fats include seeds and nuts, peanut butter, avocados, and olive oil.
- The market size for keto-friendly products has valued at more than US \$9 billion in 2019 and is forecast to reach nearly US \$15 billion by 2027.

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