

# EVERYBODY'S TALKING ABOUT... KETO

With A-list celebrities and professional athletes touting the benefits, **Emily Pettit** presents the facts about the latest fad diet that's said to turn your body into a fat-burning machine



**M**ove aside, Atkins. With the popularity of high fat-low carb lifestyles showing no sign of abating, the ketogenic diet has become the eating plan on everyone's lips. A-listers like Halle Berry and Kim Kardashian swear by it, and famed US athletes Tim Tebow and LeBron James credit it for their sporting prowess.

Although it's new in the spotlight, the 'keto' diet was originally developed in the 1920s as a treatment option for paediatric patients with epilepsy whose seizures were not controlled by other medications. So how does it work and what does it involve?

## How it works

The aim of the keto diet is to force your body into burning a different fuel, says Meagan Atcheson, clinical dietitian at Life Bedford Gardens Hospital in Germiston. 'When an individual is in a state of ketosis, the body switches its fuel supply to run on fat and ultimately burn fat, instead of carbohydrates, which is what the body usually relies on for energy.'

When on the diet, you consume large amounts of fats like butter, oil, cream or coconut oil; moderate amounts of proteins such as eggs, bacon, fish, seafood, meat or chicken; low-carb vegetables; nuts; seeds; and high-fat cheeses and yoghurt. The ratio is 70% fat, 25% protein and 5% carbohydrates.

## Effects of the keto diet

'It's no surprise that people on the keto diet lose weight. By cutting out carbohydrates and high-sugar foods completely as well as limiting proteins, the total calorie intake per day reduces drastically,' says Atcheson. However, eating large amounts of fat is a big adjustment and doesn't come without side effects. The term 'keto flu' is one experienced early on in the diet and can last for a few days to weeks as your body transitions into a ketotic state. Symptoms include nausea, diarrhoea, extreme fatigue, bad breath and altered mental function.

There is also no room for cheat days on this diet. It's strictly all or nothing – one bite of cake will immediately bring your body out of ketosis and you then have to start the process all over again. Atcheson also notes, 'Individuals should be wary of drastic weight loss at the beginning of their diet as it's likely due to loss of water weight. Carbohydrates bind with water, so when carbs are restricted, there will be a drop in water weight instead of actual fat mass. Proper fat loss will come with time and consistency.'

## Does it come recommended?

The majority of registered dietitians would not recommend the diet to someone looking to lose weight.

They would rather opt for a balanced, nutritious lifestyle change instead of a short-term, restrictive diet. However, for children with epilepsy, the keto diet is considered a specialised treatment option, but can only be prescribed by a trained medical professional.

Ultimately, it's important to remember that an eating plan is a personalised strategy. If you find something that works for you and improves your health and relationship with food, then go for it. There is no one right way to eat for everyone and no one miracle for weight loss. **L**

*Please talk to your doctor or registered dietitian before making a drastic change to your diet.*

## MEET OUR EXPERT



**Meagan Atcheson** is a registered dietitian working in a clinical setting at Life Bedford Gardens Hospital in Germiston, as well as in private practice in Bedfordview, Johannesburg. She is passionate about plant-based diets, health promotion and educating individuals about wholesome, balanced lifestyle changes.