

The Next Big Thing...No Not Really!

Just imagine if this was the headline for a diet you were considering going on: 'Turn your body into a fat burning machine, watch the fat melt away. Eat as much fat as you like and still lose weight.'

Now how about this headline, 'How would you like to eat a highly restrictive diet and find it almost impossible to eat out socially? Spend most of your spare time preparing and calculating how much food you can eat, decrease your exercise performance and increase your risk of heart disease and cancer? Then the keto diet is for you.'

As you would imagine most people are going to be reactive to the first headline. And it makes sense because it is way more appealing. But the reality is the second headline which most people end up with.

I'm going to make a big prediction here and say the next big thing in fad diets will be the keto or ketogenic diet. They said 2016 was the year of the Paleo diet (and a big income generator for chef Pete Evans) but it now seems to be dying a slow death due to the mis-information and general restrictive nature of the diet but there is always one to replace it.

Now I'm not here to tell you how good it is. This is more of a warning so you don't get drawn into the allure of the next fad diet to take the world by storm. So what is the ketogenic diet? Put simply it is a very low/no carbohydrate diet with most of the energy coming from fats and protein with meals containing an important ratio of 20% protein and 80% fat. Before I go any further, you have to know carbohydrates are found in an abundant amount of foods. Besides the obvious ones like pasta, rice, cereals, grains, bread, potato (both sweet and normal), they are also found in fruits, beans, legumes and dairy based foods. So you can pretty much say good bye to all these foods if you decide to follow this diet.

Good luck eating out with friends and don't even bother celebrating birthdays because it's no cake for you.

The traditional ketogenic diet involves eating less than 50 grams of carbohydrate a day. So over the course of one day you can only eat around one cup of porridge or rolled oats or three slices of whole grain bread or less than one cup of rice or pasta or a few potatoes or three pieces of your favourite fruit. Having such a small amount of carbohydrates does two things: one, you will use up all your body stores of carbohydrates and two, as a result of this, your body will start to burn more fat and break it down, converting it ketones (hence the diets name). The body relies on these substances to fuel your body's cells, in particular your brain, nervous system and red blood cells.

As with any fad diet people start these because weight loss is the goal and this certainly happens. Studies have found when following this type of diet it is superior for greater weight loss, surprise surprise, after 6 months when compared to healthy eating advice. But after 12 months the difference was only one kilogram. Changes to cholesterol found total cholesterol and LDL cholesterol (the bad kind) increased but blood fats decreased and HDL cholesterol (the good kind) increased. Blood pressure also decreased but not significantly when compared to healthy eating advice.

Now the benefits achieved from the keto diet do look good but they are no different to the health outcomes you would achieve if you ate a healthy balanced diet from the core food groups. And again the studies have found this is the case. When they compared low-carbohydrate, low-GI, Mediterranean, and high-protein diets they were equally effective at improving health.

The key point you always have to consider with any fad diet is whether it is balanced, sustainable in the long term and practical. In this situation it isn't. The restrictive nature of the keto diet means time is spent preparing and planning meals to ensure the nutrients are in the right ratios, going out with family or friends is almost impossible because most food retailers don't bother with keto meals and the biggest concern is we really don't know what the long term impacts of the diet are. This diet has been around for a long time and many people find it too hard to sustain over many of years, so play it safe, stick to a portion controlled balanced eating plan where there are not restrictions, just enjoyment of a range of foods.

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