

KETOGENIC DIET FOR OBESITY: FRIEND OR FOE?

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Obesity is reaching epidemic proportions and is a strong risk factor for a number of cardiovascular and metabolic disorders such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, dyslipidemia, atherosclerosis, and also certain types of cancers. Despite the constant recommendations of health care organizations regarding the importance of weight control, this goal often fails. Genetic predisposition in combination with inactive lifestyles and high caloric intake leads to excessive weight gain. Even though there may be agreement about the concept that lifestyle changes affecting dietary habits and physical activity are essential to promote weight loss and weight control, the ideal amount and type of exercise and also the ideal diet are still under debate. For many years, nutritional intervention studies have been focused on reducing dietary fat with little positive results over the long-term. One of the most studied strategies in the recent years for weight loss is the ketogenic diet. Many studies have shown that this kind of nutritional approach has a solid physiological and biochemical basis and is able to induce effective weight loss along with improvement in several cardiovascular risk parameters. This review discusses the physiological basis of ketogenic diets and the rationale for their use in obesity, discussing the strengths and the weaknesses of these diets together with cautions that should be used in obese patients.