Your Child’s Hospital Stay to Start the Ketogenic Diet

What you and your child can expect

Before you come to the hospital

To prepare your child to start the diet:

• The night before you come to the hospital, do not give your child any food or drinks after midnight, except water.
• Do not feed your child breakfast the morning that you come to the hospital. Hospital staff will give your child a ketogenic lunch.
• Do not give your child any medicines in the morning until after their blood is drawn at the hospital.

Things to bring to the hospital:

❑ Your child’s medicines. It is very important to bring any medicines that your child is taking regularly. Bring them in the original packaging.
❑ Toothpaste that is OK to use on the ketogenic diet. Your dietitian will give you a list of the kinds that you can buy.
❑ Comfortable clothes for you for 3 to 4 days. Your child might also want to have 1 or more changes of clothes.
❑ Your child’s favorite toys and books.
❑ DVDs from home. The inpatient playroom also has videos and games you can check out while your child is staying in the hospital.
❑ Favorite sippy cups, straws or bottles.
❑ Your child’s comfort items, such as a pillow, blanket and stuffed animal.

Why does my child need to stay in the hospital to start the ketogenic diet?

The ketogenic diet is a complicated medical treatment that changes the way your child’s body uses energy. It is safest for your child to start this diet under close observation by their ketogenic diet team.

How long will my child be in the hospital?

Most children stay in the hospital a few days unless there are complications. If it is hard for your child’s body to adjust to the diet, they might need to stay a few days longer.
What will happen to my child while we are in the hospital?

Starting the diet
Your child will begin the diet on their first day at the hospital. Ketogenic meals will be brought to your child’s room. It is important that your child eats all of the food that the diet technician brings.

Tests and labs
Your child’s ketogenic diet team will check on how your child is doing each day. They will look at:

- Your child’s urine for ketones. They will use special strips that show how deeply your child is in ketosis. If your child is potty trained, they will pee into a small tub or basin and the strip will be dipped in the urine to check ketones. If your child wears diapers, we will put a cotton ball in their diaper and it wring it out to check urine.
- Your child’s blood sugar with a finger poke every 6 hours.
- Your child’s blood ketones once a day by taking some blood from a vein (venous blood draw).
- Your child’s vital signs like heart rate and blood pressure. This will happen many times a day.
- Your child’s ketogenic diet team might need to order some other tests with a finger poke or blood draw.

Your child’s feelings and what to expect
Your child might feel tired during the first few days or weeks after starting the diet. This usually goes away.

At the beginning of the diet, your child will probably feel hungry. For the diet to work, it is important for your child to get into a deep state of ketosis. This means that your child may not be able to eat as much as usual. Your child might feel angry or upset about this, or about eating different foods than they are used to. Most children stop feeling hungry after their bodies get used to the diet.

Starting the diet can be stressful for your child. Try to spend a lot of time with your child. One parent or caregiver will spend the night.

Other things that might happen
Your child might feel like throwing up (feel nauseated), and might vomit when they start the diet. Your child’s ketogenic diet team will change the diet or treat your child to fix this problem.

Your child might have more seizures than usual when they start the diet. This is because of the extra stress on your child when there are big changes in their body. It can also be stressful for your child to be in the hospital. These things all often get better as your child gets used to being on the diet.
Learning more about the diet during your child’s stay

The ketogenic team will teach you about this diet before this hospital stay. During your child’s stay, a ketogenic dietitian will spend more time teaching you about the diet. You will have a notebook with information about the diet. Before your child is admitted you will need to buy a special scale (a gram scale) for measuring food.

The ketogenic diet team will teach you:

• How to weigh foods using a gram scale
• How to make meals and recipes that fit into the diet
• How to identify and treat common problems
• When to call for help
• How to keep track of seizures that your child has while on the diet. This helps the ketogenic diet team make changes to help control seizures better
• How to manage the ketogenic diet when your child is sick

It is important to arrange for a friend or family member to care for your child during the teaching. It is best when you can focus all your attention on learning about the diet. Hospital volunteers may be able to stay with your child. Ask your child’s nurse about getting a volunteer to stay with your child.

Please let your child’s ketogenic diet team know if you cannot be at the hospital at any time. This will help them schedule the teaching.

To Learn More

• Neurology 206-987-2078
• Your child’s healthcare provider
• www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

• In the hospital, ask your child’s nurse.
• From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

Seattle Children’s offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children’s will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children’s. However, your child’s needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child’s healthcare provider.

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