

# Ketogenic Diets and Your Student

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Information about having a child on a ketogenic diet in the classroom.

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## What are ketogenic diets?

Ketogenic diets are medical treatments to control seizures. There are 2 types:

- The classic ketogenic diet
- The modified Atkins diet

Most children who eat by mouth will be on the modified Atkins diet, which is less restrictive than the ketogenic diet.

Both diets are made up of foods that are high in fat (butter, cream and oil), medium in protein (meats and eggs) and very low in carbohydrates (sugars, fruits, vegetables and grains). The higher intake of dietary fat changes the metabolism in the body to use fat as fuel for the brain.

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## What are the benefits of the diets?

- Reduction in seizures
  - Improved motor skills
  - Improved behavior and cognition
  - Potential to reduce or remove seizure medicine
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## What are the risks of the diets?

- Upset stomach, nausea, vomiting and constipation
  - Reflux
  - Dehydration
  - Delayed growth
  - Vitamin deficiency (children on the diets must take vitamin and mineral supplements)
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## Does the diet need to be strictly followed?

Yes. The ketogenic diets are medical therapy for epilepsy and must be precisely followed 100% of the time. The diets require strict control over carbohydrates eaten (orally) and applied to the skin (topical). Like exposure to peanuts for a child with a peanut allergy, accidental carbohydrate ingestion or exposure can result in a medical emergency.

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### To Learn More

- Neurology  
206-987-2078
- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your 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.

### Accommodations for the classroom

- As much as possible, treat the child just like any other student. Children on ketogenic diets do not need any physical restrictions and should be included in all classroom activities.
- **Hydration:** Children on ketogenic diets should always have access to water and carbohydrate-free fluid. Fluid intake should be encouraged.
- **Eating meals provided by parents:** As long as the child eats the fat in their meal from home, it is OK if they do not finish the entire thing. Fat is the most important part of any meal when following the modified Atkins diet. Work with the child's parents to determine if meals need to be monitored to verify what is eaten.
- **Craft supplies:** Children on the ketogenic diet need to wear gloves when working with paint, playdough, glue or other craft supplies that can get on the skin. Gloves protect the child from accidental carbohydrate exposure through the skin. Using crayons and markers is OK.
- **First aid:** Band-Aids are OK. Neosporin or bacitracin ointments are OK. Avoid antibiotic creams. Vaseline is also OK.
- **Medicine:** Any medicine given to the child by school staff during the day must be supplied by the parent or guardian.
- **Creams, lotions and sprays:** Any creams, lotions or sprays, such as sunscreen or bug spray, must be carbohydrate-free and supplied by the parent or guardian.
- **Treats and rewards:** Provide non-food rewards in the classroom. If events include food or treats, please inform the child's parent or guardian in advance, so they may provide a ketogenic-friendly treat as an alternative.
- **Sharing food:** Children on ketogenic diets should not be allowed to share any food with other children.
- **Have an emergency plan:** Accidental carbohydrate exposure can be a medical emergency. Make a plan with parents for what to do ahead of time.
- **Communication with parents is key!** Plan regular check-in times and modes of communication that work well for everyone (such as email, daily notebook, in-person and phone meetings).