

# Your Child's Hospital Stay to Start the Ketogenic Diet

## What to expect

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This handout explains how you can prepare your child before coming to the hospital for a few nights to begin the ketogenic diet. It will tell you what to expect during the hospital stay and what you will learn about maintaining the diet once your child is back home.

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

The ketogenic diet is a complicated medical treatment for seizures 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.

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### What do I do before I 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. We will give your child Ketogenic formula or food after you are admitted to the hospital.
  - You may give medicines to your child on their regular schedule.
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### What should I 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 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.
  - Video entertainment, a tablet or laptop. 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.
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### How long will my child be in the hospital?

Most children stay in the hospital 3-4 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.

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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.

### What will happen to my child while we are in the hospital?

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#### How do they start 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 eat all of the food.

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#### What tests and labs are done?

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

- Blood sugar with a finger poke every 6 hours.
  - Blood ketones once a day by taking some blood from a vein (venous blood draw).
  - Vital signs like heart rate and blood pressure. This will happen many times a day.
  - Other tests with a finger poke or blood draw if needed.
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#### What can I expect about my child's feelings?

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 getting less food 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.

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#### What other things might happen?

Your child might feel like throwing up (feel nauseated) and might vomit when they start the diet. Their 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 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.

### How can I learn more about the diet during my 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 manage the ketogenic diet when your child is sick

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.

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