



Does what I eat affect my epilepsy?

Sponsored by The Charlie Foundation for Ketogenic Therapies

Studies dating back to the 1920s have shown that diet can improve seizure control in people who have epilepsy. Although these studies are based on a strict diet called the ketogenic diet, recent evidence has shown that less restrictive diets may also be helpful. The Modified Atkins diet and the Low Glycemic Index Treatment are two such diets that have been studied. The common feature of these diets is that they eliminate sugar and all sweets. Nutritionists who counsel people with epilepsy have noted that even simple but consistent diet changes have resulted in improvement in seizure control. These diet changes include steps towards a natural, whole foods diet. They do not require medical supervision and may be adopted by anyone who wishes to improve his or her diet. It may take several days or even a few weeks of consistently eating a healthier diet to affect your epilepsy.

How Do I Begin?

Dietary habits can be hard to change if too many changes are made at the same time. It is also very common for people to get excited about a 'new diet' but lose that enthusiasm after two weeks. Making one change at a time is best. We recommend that you take the time to talk to a family member or friend about your intentions to improve your diet. This will help you to commit to making positive changes. He or she may even join you in this endeavor.

Step One Eliminate Simple Sugars

The first step is a very important one; eliminate foods with a high concentration of simple sugars. This type of carbohydrate has a high glycemic index which means that they are rapidly absorbed into the body. Once you have eliminated these foods completely for several weeks, you may find that you no longer have the desire to eat them. Your body will be more satisfied with whole, natural foods.

Eliminate High Glycemic Index Foods

SWEETENERS

- Table Sugar
- Honey
- Syrups

SWEETENED BEVERAGES

- Fruit Juices
- Sports Drinks
- Soft Drinks
- Energy Drinks

SWEETS

- Cake
- Candy
- Cookies
- Crackers
- Pastries
- Pies
- Ice Cream Treats

PROCESSED FOODS

- Sweetened Cereals
- Crackers
- French Fries
- Pretzels
- Rice Cakes
- Snack Chips
- White Bread & Rolls
- White Quick Cooking Rice
- Granola and Bars

FRUIT

- Dried Fruit
- Fruit Roll Ups
- Watermelon
- Fruited Yogurt

Step Two Eat a Natural, Whole Foods Diet

This is a major step that can be broken down into smaller steps. Eating a diet that consists of whole, natural foods is a very healthy diet. Whole foods are foods that have little or no processing. Minimally processed foods have at most 3 ingredients. If you see a food label listing more than 3 ingredients, you can be sure that it is processed. Whole, natural foods have the highest concentration of nutrients and the least artificial ingredients.



Choose a Whole, Natural Foods Diet

BEVERAGES

Water
Tea
Coffee

TREATS

Nuts
Seeds

PROTEIN

Meat
Poultry
Eggs
Fish
Shellfish
Dairy

CARBOHYDRATES

Vegetables
Fruit
Whole Grains
Legumes

LIPIDS (FATS)

Olive Oil
Butter
Seed Oils
Coconut Oil

Nutrients and Brain Health

Whole Food	Nutrients	Function or Benefits
Water	Hydrogen, oxygen and minerals	These elements are essential to the life of all cells, particularly the brain which is 70% water.
Tea	Flavonoids, Polyphenols (especially green tea)	Anticarcinogenic, anti-inflammatory and immune function benefits.
Coffee	Polyphenols	Stimulant, diuretic, anticarcinogenic. Caffeine can be toxic in large doses.
Nuts & Seeds	A power-source of essential fatty acids including Omega-3 plus vitamins and minerals.	Assists in energy metabolism and cell health, especially important in brain function.
Protein Foods	Amino acids plus vitamins, minerals and fatty acids.	Essential to the formation of all cells including neurotransmitters in the brain.
Carbohydrate Foods	Glucose, vitamins and minerals, fiber, antioxidants, polyphenols, flavonoids, phytochemicals.	Carbohydrate-rich foods provide an easy energy source to cells. The nutrients that are found in whole food carbohydrates are essential enzymes in many biological pathways.
Lipids (Fats)	Fatty acids and Vitamins A, D, and E.	Essential for the health of all cells especially for myelin, the layer around our brain. Vitamin D is extra important for people who are taking anti-seizure medications. Lipids provide an excellent alternate energy source to the brain when carbohydrate is limited. Ketogenic diets include more lipids than carbohydrates. This type of therapy can be a very effective treatment for epilepsy but requires medical supervision.