

Modified Atkins Diet (MAD) for Epilepsy

What is the Modified Atkins Diet?

- This diet is a high-fat, low-carbohydrate (carb) diet.
- Studies have found that a MAD diet can help cut or prevent seizures in some people with epilepsy. We do not yet know the reason these diets may help seizures. Scientists study these diets to learn more about how they work.
- Most of the time, the body uses sugar (glucose) for energy. The MAD forces the body to use fat for energy instead.
- If the diet is helping seizures it may be used for 2 to 3 years. If the diet is not helpful, it may be stopped after a few months.

How do we start the MAD?

Do not start this diet before talking with your child's neurologist. There are blood tests that should be done before starting the diet. The MAD is not a good fit for everyone.

You will meet with a dietitian to learn about this diet. They will tell you about low carb choices and creative recipes can help to make the diet easier to follow. Follow up will be done in the clinic.

What to eat

- A lot of fat, like nuts, avocado, butter, mayonnaise and oil.
- Low-carb, high protein foods like meat, eggs and cheese.
- A little bit of fruit or vegetables.
- Prescribed vitamin and mineral supplements.

What not to eat

- Milk and juice. Use cream water and other low-carb drinks instead.
- Regular bread, pasta, dessert, and candy because it has sugar.
- The dietitian will talk with you about lower carb choices for these items.

Will medicines change after starting the MAD?

Often, the diet is started with your child's current medicines. Some medicines may need to be changed to a kind with less carbs. If the diet helps to improve seizures, medicines may change in the future.

What are the side effects?

Side effects are not common but may happen.

- The most common side effect is having a hard time pooping (constipation).
- The diet may also increase acid in the body. This is called acidosis. Your doctor will look for this at your child's follow up.
- A less common effect is kidney stones.

Drinking enough fluid and taking prescribed supplements will help with these issues. This diet is high in fat but most children will not gain too much weight or get high cholesterol while on the diet.

What follow-up care is needed?

Routine visits to the Neurology Clinic are needed. At each visit, the dietitian will look at growth and nutrition. Blood work will be done to see how your child is doing with the diet. To get the best seizure control your doctor may make diet or medicine changes.

More resources on dietary therapies for epilepsy:

- Book: The Ketogenic and Modified Atkins Diets: Treatments for Epilepsy and Other Disorders by Dr Eric Kossoff and team
- Website: Epilepsy.com (English only) Use the search feature to find information on MAD or Keto diets
- Website: Charliefoundation.org (English only)

Other teaching sheets that may be helpful

- The Ketogenic Diet for Epilepsy (#1341)

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if your child has special health care needs not covered by this information

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.