

Monitoring your progress on the Ketogenic diet

One of the best things about the ketogenic diet is your ability to monitor how well you are doing and how you are reacting to different foods. Here are some different ways to keep track of your progress on your diet:

Weight – It is a good idea to weigh yourself when you first begin. Most people lose between 5 and 15 pounds each month for the first three months. I suggest that you do this weekly so you are not too focused on this one indicator. One reason that weight is not always a good indication of how well you are doing is that muscle tissue is much heavier than fat tissue. So you could be losing fat and building muscle and the scale would not show this change. That is why it is also important to check your body measurements.

Body fat percentage – Some digital scales will also measure this level. I am not sure how accurate bathroom scales are, but as you lose fat and gain muscle, this percentage will decrease. I suggest that you also do this only once a week.

Body measurements – There are multiple measurements that you can take of your body. I suggest that at a minimum, you measure your waist once a week. If you want, you can also measure other areas like chest, thighs, neck, etc. Research has shown that the waist measurement is most significant, because belly fat is a specific indicator of cardiovascular risk. I recommend getting a digital measuring tape.

Fasting blood sugar – Due to the epidemic of diabetes in this country it is very inexpensive to get a blood test unit and test strips to measure your fasting blood sugar. This is the level of sugar in your blood before you eat anything in the morning. For me this was the first indication that the diet was really working. You collect a drop of blood on a test strip, stick it in the meter and it tells you in a few seconds your level of glucose. I checked this every morning for the first couple of weeks, and then a couple of times a week. If you notice that it has gone up again, this is a signal that either you are eating too many carbs, or it could also be a sign that you are under more stress. Both of these conditions will raise your fasting blood sugar. Either way, it is an alert that something is out of balance.

Ketones – This is the most direct measurement of how well you are maintaining a state of ketosis where you are primarily burning ketones for energy instead of glucose. There are currently three different ways to measure your ketones. Each has its advantages and disadvantages.

Urine test strips – These are by far the least expensive and very effective in the beginning. You simply test your urine and it changes color based on the level of ketones in your urine. The problem is that when you are fully adapted to the new diet, your body will usually not spill ketones into the urine. So at that point, the urine will test as having no ketones. So at first this is good, but after a month or so is not very accurate.

Blood ketone testing – This is the gold standard of ketone testing. Just as with the fasting blood sugar, you have a meter and test strips. These test strips and measuring unit are not the same as the one you used for testing your blood sugar. You collect a drop of blood on the strip, put it in the meter and it tells you the level of ketones in your blood. The meter is very inexpensive, but the ketone test strips are kind of pricey. If you buy here in the US, they are around \$6 each, but you can order them from a Canadian Pharmacy and they are \$2.50 each. If you can afford it, I recommend using this to confirm that you are staying in ketosis. You can do this every other day, or once a week, or if you suspect that something has caused you to go out of ketosis.

Breath ketone testing – In the past year, a breath ketone analyzer called Ketonix has come on the market. This is what I have primarily used. The initial cost is \$150, but then you use it as many times as you like at no extra cost. It plugs into a USB port of your computer and comes with software. You blow into the device for 15 seconds and it gives you a reading of the level of the ketones in your breath. This has been shown to have a pretty good correlation with the blood ketone testing. If your breath ketone levels are coming down, it is an indicator that something is causing you to go out of ketosis.

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