



ONLINE COVERAGE

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All you need to know about the keto diet and if it can cause kidney failure



Heena Khandelwal | Published: | 06th October 2020 04:24 PM



Keto or ketogenic is a low-carbohydrate and high-fat diet. (Image courtesy: Instagram/keto_personal_diet)

The demise of actress Mishti Mukherjee, who had worked in Bangla, Tamil and Hindi films, earlier this month due to renal failure, allegedly caused by keto diet has brought the fad diet at the centre of discussion. To understand more about keto diet and if it can actually lead to kidney failure, INDULGE spoke to three nutritionists.

What is a keto diet?

Keto or ketogenic is a low-carbohydrate and high-fat diet. It involves drastically reducing carbs intake and replacing it with fat. This reduction in carbs puts your body into a metabolic state called ketosis, where your body efficiently uses fat as a fuel for energy.

"A ketogenic diet typically contains 75% fats, 20% proteins and only 5% carbs. It was originally designed to be used in several medical conditions such as the treatments of epileptic seizures in children, helps with high blood sugar levels, Alzheimer's, etc. But, nowadays, people use this diet to reduce weight within a short time span without understanding the seriousness of the adverse effects this diet could cause," says Shivani Aggarwal, an independent Clinical Nutritionist with 10 years of experience.



Shivani Aggarwal, Pooja Bhargava and Ruchi Sharma

What makes it such a rage among people?

The keto diet is popular because it is easy to follow and on the surface seems effective. In the first few days, a person can experience a significant loss of water weight. Since the number on the scale is going down, the diet appears to be working.

"But since most of this weight loss is water weight, it will return when the person consumes carbs again. And, while most people rely on scales to monitor weight loss and think any weight loss is good, the goal is actually to lose fat, which isn't always reflected on the scale," says wellness consultant Ruchi Sharma, founder of EAT.FIT.REPEAT.

Another reason behind the rage is the myth that you can have cheese, butter and processed items. "Instead of going for clean keto, people start following dirty/lazy keto and consume processed and packaged food items like cream, butter, cheese, fried foods. For instance, someone on dirty keto will order a double bacon cheeseburger without the bun instead of grilling a grass-fed steak or making a low carb salad with a high-fat dressing. Packaged & processed foods have a lot of additives & preservatives including monosodium glutamate (MSG) and trans fats, which can lead to adverse conditions like cancer, obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes," adds Ruchi.

Can the keto diet be harmful?

A ketogenic diet has numerous risks. Most importantly, it's high in saturated fat. "According to the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA), one should not consume more than 5-6% of saturated fat from the daily calories. Thus, the keto diet is associated with an increase in "bad" LDL cholesterol, which is also linked to heart disease," says health coach and fitness expert Pooja Bhargava.

She further explains that since one is not eating a wide variety of vegetables, fruits and grains, they may be at risk for deficiencies in micronutrients, including selenium, magnesium, phosphorus, and vitamins B and C.

"The Keto diet could cause low blood pressure, kidney stones, constipation, serious nutrient deficiency and an increased risk of heart diseases. Strict diets like keto could also cause social isolation and eating disorders. It is also not safe for those with any conditions involving their pancreas, liver, thyroid and gallbladder," adds Shivani.

Can it cause kidney failure as it is being alleged by Mishti's family?

While most described what happened with Mishti as a very rare case, none ruled out the possibility.

"It would be wrong on my part to cite the exact reason behind her untimely death because we don't have all the information as yet. But, the reports suggest that she was suffering from a pre-existing kidney disorder," says Pooja and explains, "The kidneys are the waste disposal system of the human body. All the harmful toxins that are present in the blood are filtered through the kidney and then excreted from the body through urine. A keto diet is definitely harsh on the kidneys since it is high in protein, which overloads the kidneys and affects the proper elimination of protein waste products as well."

Should one go on a keto diet?

"Keto is a very helpful diet when it comes to treating medically ill patients under the guidance of a well qualified professional (nutritionist) but if it's been used for any other purpose like weight reduction in a short span of time then I won't recommend at all. There are many other healthy and well-balanced diets which might help to fulfil such requirements," explains Shivani.

Are there other diets that can harm organs?

"Keto/Paleo/Atkins or any other fad diet may give you quicker results but at what cost? This desperation to lose the weight in 4 to 8 weeks that you've been piling on for months and years can turn fatal," states Ruchi who is against people blatantly following a diet without the guidance of a doctor or health care provider.

"Extreme diets yield extreme results but not always in the way you would like. Severe diet restriction leads to many nutrient deficiencies such as carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins (especially vitamin A, D, E, & K) and minerals like calcium, phosphorus, sodium, etc. These are essential food groups, and their absence in the diet can be the cause of numerous deficiency diseases. Abruptly resuming a regular diet can cause the phosphorus, magnesium and potassium levels to drop and lead to heart failure. Extreme diets can also result in an increase in brains levels of stress, making the brain more susceptible to stress, increasing the risk of depression and predisposing you to future binge-eating behaviours," she says while adding that having a healthy relationship with food is very important to live a healthy lifestyle.

What should an ideal diet plan look like?

A well-balanced plan of carbs, proteins and fats, vitamins and minerals, a well thought of and planned exercise routine, good hydration, a good sound sleep of seven to eight hours every day and most importantly a positive mindset is all that one needs to be lean, fit and healthy, says Pooja.