

Keywords: the carnivore diet

Problem: In 2011, all states had an adult obesity rate of less than 35%. These statistics have changed. According to 2022 population data, 22 states report that 35% or more of their citizens have adult obesity. Patients look to their PCPs for help and recommendations for weight loss. The carnivore diet is an elimination diet gaining popularity. Though weight loss results are apparent, physicians hesitate to recommend such an extreme diet. Physicians question, "Will this diet eventually result in cancer, constipation or cardiac problems?"

Solution: This article addresses common questions and misconceptions about the carnivore diet.

The Carnivore Diet: What Your Patients Need to Know

In 2011, all states had an adult obesity rate of less than 35%. According to 2022 population data, 22 states report that 35% or more of their citizens have adult obesity. Diet and exercise are the go-to interventions to combat diseases associated with obesity. Consuming a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables improves health. But busy schedules make eating healthy difficult in environments with limited healthy options.

According to the National Institute of Health (NIH), where a person lives, works and worships impacts weight loss success. Since meat is readily available and the preferred food group for many, people turn to the carnivore diet to improve weight reduction. Though weight loss results are apparent, physicians hesitate to recommend such an extreme diet. This article addresses common questions and misconceptions related to the carnivore diet.

Key Takeaways

- Due to its ability to produce significant weight loss, the carnivore diet is an elimination diet gaining popularity.
- The carnivore diet allows for the consumption of only meat or animal products. It differs from the ketogenic diet because it aims for zero carbohydrate intake.
- This high-protein diet can produce significant weight loss while reducing several obesity-related comorbidities.
- Regardless of the proven weight loss results, physicians hesitate to recommend such an extreme diet. Physicians worry that it could cause severe constipation, cardiovascular problems or even cancer.
- When weight-loss plans prove ineffective, pharmaceuticals or surgery may be a valid option.

What is the carnivore diet?

The carnivore diet **restricts food intake to meat or animal products** for every meal. This extreme elimination diet is gaining popularity because it boasts significant weight loss. For many, the carnivore diet is a dream come true.

Eating steak for breakfast, lunch and dinner while losing weight seems too good. Initially, this diet appears idyllic. However, most people have a difficult time committing long-term. Consequently, research about health outcomes is not yet available. Physicians must weigh the benefits and risks before recommending the carnivore diet.

Ketogenic vs. carnivore diet

Many assume the ketogenic and carnivore diets are the same. However, those following the **ketogenic diet consume limited carbohydrates, while the carnivore diet aims for zero carbs**. The ketogenic diet allows for a variety of vegetables and some fruits. Conversely, the carnivore diet restricts food intake to meat and animal products alone.

What are the benefits and risks of the carnivore diet?

Carbohydrates are the body's preferred energy source. When carbs are in short supply, the body relies on fats for fuel. Forcing the body to utilize fat for energy is foundational to the success of the carnivore diet.

Benefits

A high protein, low-carb diet aids in weight reduction, reducing many comorbidities associated with obesity:

- Cardiovascular conditions
- Diabetes
- Joint pain
- Arthritis

According to the American Medical Association (AMA), the average American consumes more than double the recommended sugar allotment. A high-sugar diet causes many physical and metabolic conditions. **Eliminating sugar can help many feel satisfied with less calorie intake, experience more energy and improve their mood.**

Risks

Meats are low in micronutrients and fiber but high in saturated fat. Consuming only animal products may result in malnutrition and constipation. A diet high in saturated fats can lead to

elevated low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol. An elevated LDL level **increases the risk of heart disease, the leading cause of death in the United States.**

Processed meats, like bacon and deli meat, are high in sodium and are linked to cancer. High-sodium deli meats can also cause kidney problems and hypertension.

Weighing the risks and benefits

Patients look to their PCPs for help and recommendations for weight loss. Empathetic physicians understand that losing weight is challenging. Obesity increases people's risk of many devastating health problems:

- Diabetes
- Hypertension
- Heart disease
- Liver disease
- Sleep apnea
- Cancer
- High cholesterol

Many healthcare providers claim that the carnivore diet helps reduce obesity-linked illnesses. Others argue that the risks outweigh the benefits. **Patients need help finding a practical, safe and effective way to lose weight.**

When weight loss plans prove ineffective

As obesity rates rise, many people turn to bariatric services for help. **Weight-loss medications and bariatric surgery are viable options** for severely obese patients who are unable to lose weight with diet and exercise.

Weight-loss medications

Weight-loss medications work in different ways. Some cause a loss of appetite. Others make it harder for the body to absorb fats. Physicians should consider weight loss medications for the following patients:

- BMI ≥ 30
- BMI ≥ 27 and health conditions related to weight

Most patients regain some weight after discontinuing weight-loss medications. Additionally, most physicians try a different medication or refer the patient to a bariatric surgeon if the patient does not lose at least 5% of the starting body weight after 12 weeks.

Bariatric surgery

Metabolic and bariatric surgery is a viable option for many patients. With surgical intervention, patients can enjoy the psychological and medical benefits of a healthy weight. Consider referring these patients to a bariatric surgeon:

- BMI \geq 40
- BMI \geq 35 and two medical conditions related to obesity
- BMI \geq 30 and unmanageable type 2 diabetes

Bariatric services that help patients reach their goals

Eating a diet high in fresh fruits and vegetables is not always realistic. The carnivore diet boasts significant weight loss and other benefits. But it may increase patients' risk for constipation, elevated cholesterol levels and cancer. However, health conditions associated with obesity may be the more pressing concern. Providers must weigh the risks and benefits.

When diet and exercise prove ineffective, many turn to weight-loss drugs or surgery. Our hospital's bariatric services deliver innovative and individualized interventions, improving patient's overall wellness. Click the "Refer" button to get started.

Resources

"Behavioral Characteristics and Self-Reported Health Status among 2029 Adults Consuming a 'Carnivore Diet.'" The Journal of the American Society for Nutrition: Current Developments in Nutrition, 2021, Behavioral Characteristics and Self-Reported Health Status among 2029 Adults Consuming a "Carnivore Diet" - Current Developments in Nutrition.

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