



# Intro Guide to Ketogenic Therapy for Mental Health

Building Your Personalized Roadmap



## THINK + SMART

A Metabolic Framework for Mental Health

# Table of Contents

Intro Guide to THINK Building Your Personalized Roadmap	3
Feeling Overwhelmed? Start Here	4
Ketosis 101: How the Body's Dual Fuel System Works	5
A Time-Tested Therapy with Emerging Applications	6
Why This Paradigm Shift Is Happening	7
What Makes Ketogenic Therapy Different?	8
<b>THINK: Ten Personalized Elements to Start Your Journey</b>	
1. Figure Out a Plan for Clinical Oversight	9
2. Target Your Duration for Ketosis	13
3. Plan Your Baseline Lab Work and Metabolic Health Measures	14
4. Consider Supplementation	15
5. Define Your Dietary Approach	17
6. Set Your Macronutrient Strategy	18
7. Should Fasting Be Part of Your Ketogenic Therapy?	20
8. Choose Your Ketone Goal	22
9. Pick a Testing Strategy	23
10. Decide on Testing Frequency	24
Final Word: This Is Your Path	25
FAQs	26

# THINK + SMART

## A Metabolic Framework for Mental Health

This introductory guide walks you through **THINK** (Therapeutic Integration of Nutritional Ketosis), the ketogenic therapy component of [THINK+SMART](#)—a metabolic framework for mental health brought to you by Metabolic Mind. A THINK strategy is any way of eating, fasting and moving that triggers the body to burn ketones for energy, leading to a cascade of **mental and physical health benefits**.

**THINK+SMART** is a free, self-guided tool rooted in the emerging field of metabolic psychiatry. It was created by Metabolic Mind founder Jan Ellison Baszucki and [shaped by experts by experience](#)—individuals who have successfully used metabolic therapies to improve their mental well-being and brain health. THINK stands for Therapeutic Integration of Nutritional Ketosis. SMART stands for Sleep, Move, Avoid, Rebuild, and Track. Together, THINK+SMART comprises a growing **database of metabolic strategies that people are using to transform how their body and brain use energy**—laying a foundation for healing.

While every person's journey is different, many find that prioritizing THINK—and entering a state of ketosis—can create the stability, energy, and symptom relief needed to integrate other SMART strategies more effectively.

Through the THINK+SMART framework, people have discovered powerful, personalized paths to wellness. Their stories reflect a shared truth: there's no one right way to do metabolic therapy—only the right way for you. [By watching our experts by experience share their journeys](#), you'll see this truth in action: ketogenic therapy can be adapted in many different ways, yet still lead to profound healing. This guide draws from those

collective insights to help you begin shaping your own personalized plan—with support from your care team and community.

We know many people are simply looking for a keto diet plan to lose weight, but THINK is more than that. **It's a tool that can help transform your physiology and potentially your life.** Ketogenic diets can span the entire spectrum—from vegan to carnivore—and can be adapted to honor your cultural food preferences. Because every individual's metabolism, medications, health conditions, sensitivities and preferences are different, this therapy must be highly personalized. What works for one person may not work for another—and that's okay. Ketogenic therapy invites experimentation, flexibility, and learning.

This Intro Guide offers a brief overview of metabolic psychiatry and then walks you through the **ten fundamentals of THINK**—providing a starting point to develop a version of ketogenic therapy that feels realistic, sustainable, and tailored to your unique needs.

Metabolic psychiatry is a rapidly evolving field, and advances in precision nutrition will continue to help people find the approach that best fits their biology and lifestyle. But even with the tools we have now, thousands are already experiencing life-changing results.

**We're excited for you to start your journey!**

# A Journey of Ongoing Learning

This guide is a starting point—a foundation to help you understand the core principles of ketogenic therapy as a metabolic intervention for mental health. It brings together essential information and points you to robust external resources so you can continue learning at your own pace.

**We want to emphasize: this is a learning journey.**

Give yourself grace. It's normal for it to take time to understand the core ideas—and even longer for your body to fully adapt to ketosis. Everyone's metabolism is different. For some, becoming metabolically flexible and achieving sustained ketosis can take several weeks or even months.

Importantly, this is not an all-or-nothing process.

Every step counts. You might begin simply by eliminating sugar and ultra-processed foods, and then layer in other elements over time.

Here's what we most want you to remember:

- **You don't need to figure everything out right away. Start small—tiny changes can lead to noticeable improvements that build momentum.**
- **You can adapt the process to fit your life. This path is flexible and can evolve with you over time.**
- **Start where you are. Adjust when needed. Learn as you go.**

## Feeling Overwhelmed? *Start Here*

If you're in the midst of a crisis or experiencing severe symptoms, starting ketogenic therapy might feel like too much to take on all at once. That's completely okay.

You don't have to do everything right away. You can start gently.

Here's a simple plan—shared by [Accord](#), a metabolic residential health program—that can help you begin taking small steps in the right direction:

[Getting Started With a New Way to Fuel Your Body](#)

Once your symptoms begin to ease, you can return to this Intro Guide to THINK and start shaping a more personalized protocol that works for you.

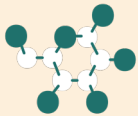
You might also find this article by expert by experience Hannah Warren helpful. It explores what can come before lifestyle change—simply imagining a better future and reconnecting with a sense of hope:

[A Path Out of the Hell of Mental Illness: Three Practical Tools for Finding Your Way in the Darkness](#)

# Ketosis 101:

## How the Body's Dual Fuel System Works

Think of it your body as a hybrid car that can run on both gasoline and electricity. Similarly, the human body has two primary fuel systems:



**Glucose**, which comes primarily from carbohydrates



**Ketones**, which are produced when the body breaks down fat for energy during a state called ketosis

Don't confuse ketosis with ketoacidosis, which is a metabolic state associated with dangerously high ketones that can be experienced in diabetes. Ketosis, on the other hand, is a normal metabolic state that simply means the body is using fat for fuel.

In our modern world—where carbohydrates are abundant—most people spend their entire lives in a glucose-burning state. But historically, humans experienced cycles of feast and famine, naturally entering ketosis during food scarcity.

The body prioritizes glucose because it's fast and easy to access. As long as glucose is available, your body won't produce ketones. But when glucose becomes scarce, your insulin levels drop, and the body begins converting fat (both dietary and stored) into ketone bodies:

- Beta-hydroxybutyrate (BHB)
- Acetoacetate
- Acetone

This metabolic state—nutritional ketosis—is what ketogenic therapy seeks to harness.

### You can enter ketosis through:



**Carbohydrate reduction**



**Fasting**



**Fasting combined with limiting carbohydrates**



**Extreme or prolonged exercise that depletes liver glycogen**

# A Time-Tested Therapy with Emerging Applications

Ketogenic therapy is not just another diet—it's a targeted medical intervention with medication-like effects on the brain and body. Originally developed to stop seizures in individuals with drug-resistant epilepsy over 100 years ago, it has now shown promise for stabilizing brain energy, reducing inflammation, improving mitochondrial function, and modulating neurotransmitters. Many treatments used in epilepsy overlap with those for serious mental illness—suggesting shared underlying mechanisms.

1915



Dr. Howland studies link between fasting and epilepsy

1921



"Ketogenic diet" is coined

1936



Thousands of children begin treatment for epilepsy at Johns Hopkins



**Today, ketogenic therapy is also widely used to treat:**

- Obesity
- Type 2 diabetes
- Polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS)
- Other metabolic disorders

More recently, clinicians, researchers, and patients are applying ketogenic therapy to psychiatric and neurological conditions, including:

- Bipolar disorder
- Major depression
- Schizophrenia
- Eating disorders
- Anxiety
- ADHD
- OCD
- PTSD
- Dementia and Alzheimer's disease
- Parkinson's, ALS, Huntington's, and other neurodegenerative diseases

And more...

# Why This **Paradigm Shift** Is Happening

This new wave of using ketogenic therapy to treat psychiatric disorders is being driven by pioneering psychiatrists:



## **Dr. Christopher Palmer**

Developed the [Brain Energy theory](#), which proposes that mental illness is the result of metabolic dysfunction affecting the brain—and that therapeutic ketosis may help repair this underlying issue in some individuals.



## **Dr. Georgia Ede**

Explores the powerful connection between nutrition, insulin resistance, and brain health. In her book [Change Your Diet, Change Your Mind](#), she examines how dietary strategies—especially the ketogenic diet—can support mental well-being.



## **Dr. Shebani Sethi**

Founded the [Metabolic Psychiatry Clinic at Stanford University](#) and led one of the [first pilot trials exploring ketogenic therapy as a treatment for bipolar disorder and schizophrenia](#).



## **Dr. Matthew Bernstein**

Founder of [Accord](#), a metabolic residential health program, who organized the first ever public conference on Metabolic Psychiatry.

A surge of progress in metabolic psychiatry is being powered by:

- A growing number of case studies, pilot trials, and over a dozen active clinical studies on ketogenic therapy for serious mental illness.
  - [The State of the Research](#)
  - [Ketogenic Metabolic Therapy as a Treatment for Mental Disorders](#)
- Thousands of lived experience testimonials, including those featured in our [THINK+SMART expert by experience stories](#)

# What Makes Ketogenic Therapy **Different?**

The effects of ketosis are pleiotropic—they influence many aspects of our physiology at once. While research is still uncovering the exact mechanisms that make it an effective therapy, we already know that:

- Ketones cross the blood-brain barrier and can serve as a more efficient fuel source than glucose, especially for those with insulin resistance.
- Ketosis enhances both the quality and quantity of mitochondria—helping to repair brain energy dysregulation, which is increasingly recognized as a core issue in many psychiatric and neurological disorders.

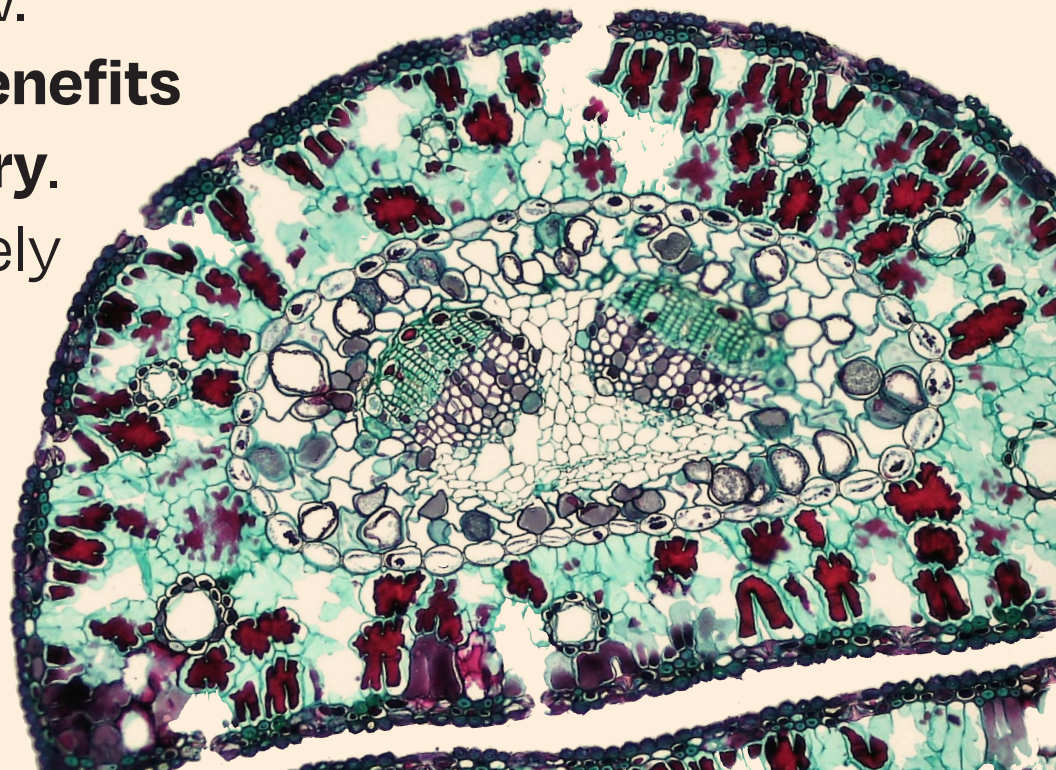
As the fields of metabolic psychiatry and metabolic neurology continue to grow, research will deepen our understanding and refine best practices. But even now, we know enough to say confidently: this therapy is worth exploring and is relatively safe when done with proper clinical support.

For those who've made ketogenic therapy work despite the current unknowns, the process is often one of trial and error. We encourage you to be patient and adaptable as you find the version of ketosis that helps your brain function optimally and restores a sense of well-being. What experts by experience tend to share with others is this:

The risks are low.

**The potential benefits  
are extraordinary.**

And it's absolutely  
worth a try.



# THINK:

## 10 Personalized Elements to Start Your Journey

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### 01.

## Figure Out a Plan for Clinical Oversight

### Why You Need Support—And How to Get It

Ketogenic therapy isn't just a dietary change—it's a powerful metabolic intervention that has medication-like effects on the brain and body. That's why it's essential to approach it with the same level of medical care and respect you'd give to starting or adjusting a psychiatric medication. Like any therapeutic tool, it is safest and most effective with clinical support.

### How Keto Interacts with Medications

Ketogenic therapy can significantly alter how medications affect your body. Many individuals implementing therapeutic keto will eventually need to adjust medication doses gradually and carefully, ideally with a prescriber who understands how metabolic changes influence brain chemistry and drug metabolism.

One important consideration is a phenomenon known as potentiation—where entering ketosis may amplify the effects of certain medications, leading to intensified side effects. As a result, some individuals may need to reduce their dosages, even if they hadn't originally intended to taper.

Conversely, ketosis will lower the blood levels of some medications. Prescribers who aren't trained to understand the impact of ketosis may mistakenly increase doses to target a blood level, rather than being guided by symptoms. For example, if a blood test shows lithium or anti-epileptic blood levels have dropped but symptoms have improved, increasing the dose may not be recommended. In fact, lower blood levels in this context may mean fewer side effects without sacrificing mood stability.

If you have significantly increased your protein levels when beginning ketogenic therapy, this, too, can impact blood levels of your medications, especially if you take multiple high protein-binding drugs together. It's a good idea to check with your pharmacist, or conduct an internet search, to establish the protein binding of each medication you take so that you can assess whether the added protein may be interfering with your medications. We haven't yet found a great single source for this information, so we recommend using an AI tool like ChatGPT.

Medication tapering brings its own risks, especially if done too quickly. Withdrawal symptoms may emerge that are distinct from either a return of psychiatric symptoms or a reaction to ketosis. This complexity makes medication management one of the most delicate aspects of implementing ketogenic therapy. Many people find it's worth working through these issues given the dramatic improvements that may be possible.

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This complexity makes medication management **one of the most delicate aspects** of implementing ketogenic therapy.

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### You Define the Goal

People come to ketogenic therapy with different intentions:

- Some plan to use it alongside medication long-term—to boost energy, stabilize mood, or ease side effects like weight gain, elevated blood sugar, insulin resistance and brain fog.
- Others hope to gradually reduce or even fully taper off medications, aiming to rely on metabolic therapies as their primary form of treatment.
- Some taper off daily medications but keep them on hand to take as needed.
- Some who are newly diagnosed but not in crisis may wish to try metabolic therapies before taking medication.
- Finally, some adopt ketogenic therapy to prevent onset of psychiatric or neurological illness altogether

We support all these goals. What matters most is that you define what “healing” looks like for you—and pursue it thoughtfully, safely, and with the support you need to succeed.

While research is still developing, we don't yet know how many people may ultimately be able to use ketogenic therapy in place of psychiatric medications. What we do know is this: your well-being comes first, and the goal is always to find what's most life-enhancing for you.

# What If You Don't Have a **Keto-Informed Prescriber?**

We recognize that not everyone has access to a psychiatrist or doctor trained in ketogenic therapy. The good news is, with planning and resourcefulness, many people have still found success.

At a minimum, try to find:

- A prescriber who is emotionally supportive of your decision to try keto
- A keto-informed volunteer or paid professional—a dietitian, therapist, coach, or medical provider—who can help guide and collaborate with your care team

Even one or two consultations with a knowledgeable expert can make a big difference. However, because most keto-informed services are out-of-pocket, we understand that not everyone can afford them. Many individuals have still found success by educating themselves, engaging with peer support, and advocating within their existing care team.

## **Resources that can help with your plan for clinical oversight:**

### **Mental Health Keto**

offers group programs that provide education and peer support; there are some scholarships available for those on government disability

### **Can Patients do Medical Keto Without a Metabolic Psychiatrist?**

### **Clinician Directory**

### **How to Talk to your Doctor About Keto**

### **Free Continuing Medical Education (CMEs)**

on metabolic therapies you can share with your care team

### **The Most Important Step in Mental Health Care That No One Tells You:**

Lauren Kennedy West of Living Well After Schizophrenia's advice on self-advocacy and working with a care team

# Tapering Safely: The Hyperbolic Approach

If you decide—or need—to taper medications, it's essential to go slowly and cautiously. We recommend learning about hyperbolic tapering, a method that involves extremely gradual dose reductions to minimize risk. Unfortunately, many prescribers are unfamiliar with this method, so self-education and advocacy with your prescriber is key.

Final Word:  
**Safety =  
Empowerment**

You deserve a care team that believes in your capacity to heal.

You don't have to do this alone. With the right support and knowledge, ketogenic therapy can become safer, more empowering, and more sustainable—one step at a time.

There is also a growing community of experts by experience—individuals who have walked this path and now offer peer support and encouragement to others.

Finding community and engaging with online peer support spaces in metabolic psychiatry can be invaluable and is highly encouraged. For many, it becomes one of the most impactful parts of their healing journey—offering emotional connection, practical insights, and the reassurance that you're not alone.

Some peer support networks and groups in this space include:

- [Keto Lifestyle for Mental Health](#) led by expert by experience [Donika Hristova](#)
- [Mental Health and the Ketogenic Life Style](#) led by expert by experience [Mia Mendez](#)
- [Metabolic Therapies for Mental Disorders](#) led by expert by experience [Lauren Kennedy West](#)
- [Metabolic Collective](#), a grassroots nonprofit that mobilizes volunteer advocates



**Tapering too quickly can be extremely dangerous.**

Resources for education on safe tapering that you can explore and share with your provider:

- [Inner Compass Initiative](#)
- [Taper Clinic](#)
- [Tapering Psychiatric Medications on Keto with Dr. Bret Scher, Dr. Georgia Ede, and expert by experience Matt Baszucki](#)
- Metabolic Mind's [Keto and Psychiatric Medications YouTube Playlist](#)

# 02.

## Target Your Duration for Ketosis

### Healing takes time—so choose a timeline that supports your mindset.

One of the most important mindset shifts when beginning ketogenic therapy is recognizing that this isn't a quick fix—it's a metabolic healing process, and everyone's timeline is different.

Testimonials from individuals with lived experience reveal a wide range of responses:

- Some people notice improvements—like reduced anxiety, better mood, or sharper focus—within just a few days or weeks.
- Others report that it took several months—or even close to a year—before experiencing noticeable mental health changes

That's why, if you're using ketogenic therapy to support a psychiatric or neurological condition, we strongly recommend committing to at least three or four months, but ideally one full year. This gives your brain and body the time they may need to adapt to ketosis and begin healing.

Many who stay the course report that the long-term benefits—like symptom remission, restored functioning, and renewed vitality—are well worth the sacrifices. We often hear that the longer people use ketogenic therapy, the better and better they feel. For many, initial cravings fade, and the diet becomes both satisfying and enjoyable—a healthful lifestyle that brings unexpected benefits over time.

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### Start Where You Are

But we also understand that setting a long-term goal may feel overwhelming—especially at the beginning. If that's the case, consider a shorter time-bound commitment that feels empowering to you, such as:

- A 2-month trial to observe how you feel in ketosis
- If you're able to stick with ketogenic therapy for 8 weeks, even if you don't see psychiatric benefit, try to extend another 8 weeks
- Or make a 6-month commitment to give your body more time to adjust and heal

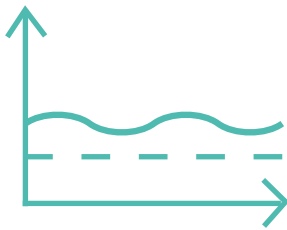
You can always reassess and extend your timeline later. What matters most is that your commitment feels motivating, not pressure-filled—and that you approach the process with curiosity and compassion.

This journey is deeply personal. Choose a timeframe that supports your mental well-being, builds confidence, and helps you move forward—one step at a time.

# 03.

## Plan Your **Baseline Lab Work** and **Metabolic Health Measures**

Keto changes your metabolism. That's a good thing—but ideally you'll want to track changes over time. Not everyone elects to track their blood biomarkers, but we strongly recommend at least one or two blood draws, in addition to regular lab work your primary care physician may order at an annual exam.



- **Establish a baseline:**  
Get your labs done before you start so you can track progress over time
- **Screen for risks or red flags:**  
To avoid misattributing pre-existing conditions to dietary changes

After you begin, we recommend the following cadence for lab work:

- **6–12 weeks after starting:**  
Follow-up for comparison to baseline, then every 12 weeks or more depending on your preference and your care team's recommendations
- **Sooner:**  
If symptoms change or labs were abnormal



### Helpful Resources:

- [Recommended List of Labs You Can Take to Your Doctor](#)
- [Labs to Check Before Starting Ketosis for Mental Health with Dr. Bret Scher](#)
- [Order Your Own Labs](#)
- [Testing for Insulin Resistance for Mental Health](#)

# 04.

## Consider Supplementation

Our experts by experience have shared many different approaches to supplementation in their THINK+SMART testimonials. Like other areas of the THINK framework, there's no single "right" way—the most important thing is to find what works best for you. Most people find electrolyte supplementation necessary as their body adjusts to being in ketosis.

Some people:

- Prefer to get all their nutrients from food
- Supplement only when a deficiency is discovered
- Take a functional medicine approach, experimenting with supplements proactively

Your strategy should feel achievable within your budget, aligned with your goals, and grounded in how your body responds.

### Key Nutrient Deficiencies to Monitor

Certain vitamin and mineral deficiencies can mimic or exacerbate mental health symptoms—particularly deficiencies in:

- Vitamin D
- B vitamins (especially B12, folate, and B6)
- Magnesium
- Zinc
- Selenium

These nutrients play key roles in brain function, neurotransmitter production, and mitochondrial health.

We also recommend checking **Carnitine**—a compound essential for transporting fatty acids into mitochondria for energy production. In some cases, carnitine deficiency can impair fat metabolism, impacting ketone levels. This isn't a marker typically tested, so you will likely need to ask for it deliberately.



#### Note for vegetarians and vegans:

Whether or not you're implementing keto, it's especially important to monitor for deficiencies and consider supplementation. Learn more about vegan and vegetarian ketogenic therapy and supplementation in this article written by expert by experience Hannah Warren:

[Is Vegetarian or Vegan Ketogenic Therapy Possible?](#)

# Electrolytes and Ketosis:

## What You Need to Know

Starting keto lowers your insulin levels, which tells your kidneys to flush out more sodium. As this happens, your body also tends to lose other important electrolytes like potassium and magnesium. These shifts are a big reason people experience symptoms like headaches, fatigue, or brain fog early on. This is often what causes the infamous “keto flu.” These symptoms aren’t from ketosis itself, but from electrolyte imbalances and mild dehydration. This isn’t dangerous; it is actually a sign that your body is establishing a more healthy baseline metabolism.

To maintain balance, many people find electrolyte supplementation helpful and often aim for the following general ranges:

<b>Sodium:</b>	Aim for <b>1,000–2,000 mg</b> per dose	Taken 1–3 times per day (i.e., 2,000–5,000+ mg daily total, especially in active individuals or during adaptation)
<b>Potassium:</b>	<b>200–400 mg</b> per day is a safe supplemental range unless guided by a clinician	Supplementation should be done with caution, especially if you’re on medications (e.g., diuretics, ACE inhibitors) or have kidney disease
<b>Magnesium:</b>	Aim for <b>200–400 mg</b> per day (usually as magnesium glycinate, citrate, or malate)	Can be split into 1–2 doses per day, especially if needed to relieve constipation or aid sleep

You can use sugar-free electrolyte mixes you can easily order online, or make your own. Like everything else in ketogenic therapy, this will be highly individualized.

## MCT Oil: A Fast Track to Ketones

Many people find that MCT oil (medium-chain triglycerides) is a helpful tool in ketogenic therapy. MCTs are uniquely metabolized—they bypass normal digestion, go straight to the liver, and are rapidly converted into ketones.

If you’re trying MCT oil:

- Start low: Begin with just ½ teaspoon per day
- Increase gradually: If tolerated, work up to 2–3 tablespoons per day
- Note: Some people experience digestive upset at first—this often improves with slow introduction
- While some individuals report positive effects from exogenous ketones, evidence supporting their use in psychiatric and neurological disorders is currently limited.

# 05.

## Define Your Dietary Approach

### Ketogenic therapy ≠ one specific diet

To enter and stay in ketosis, you don't need to follow a rigid formula—you simply need to reduce carbohydrates enough to lower insulin and allow your body to begin producing ketones.

#### **There are many different ways to achieve ketosis.**

Most existing dietary approaches can be made ketogenic. People have found success with a variety of combinations of plant and animal foods, from vegan to carnivore. What matters most is that your approach is rooted in whole foods, feels realistic for your lifestyle, and supports your mental and physical well-being.

We generally recommend:

- Prioritizing whole, nutrient-dense foods
- Limiting ultra-processed keto snacks, especially those with inflammatory oils or sugar alcohols
- Letting go of perfectionism—because the best ketogenic diet is the one you can sustain

Remember: small steps matter. Changing your diet is often a gradual process. Celebrate every success along the way—every meal, every swap, every insight is progress.

#### **If You Do Not Follow Any Other Specific Diet:**

If you don't currently follow a specific dietary approach, start by looking at what you already eat. Then, begin swapping out high-carb foods for keto-friendly alternatives. This is a gentle, approachable way to start moving toward therapeutic ketosis.

- [A Keto Diet for Beginners](#)
- [Keto Diet Foods](#)

#### **If You're Coming From Another Dietary Background:**

You can adapt many dietary philosophies to become ketogenic. Here are just a few examples:

- Paleo Keto
- [Mediterranean Keto](#)
- Carnivore Keto (Ketovore)
- [Vegetarian/Vegan Keto](#)
- Ketotarian (plant-forward pescatarian keto)

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You don't need to "choose the right one"—**you get to create the right one** for you. Let your values, preferences, and goals guide the way.

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# 06.

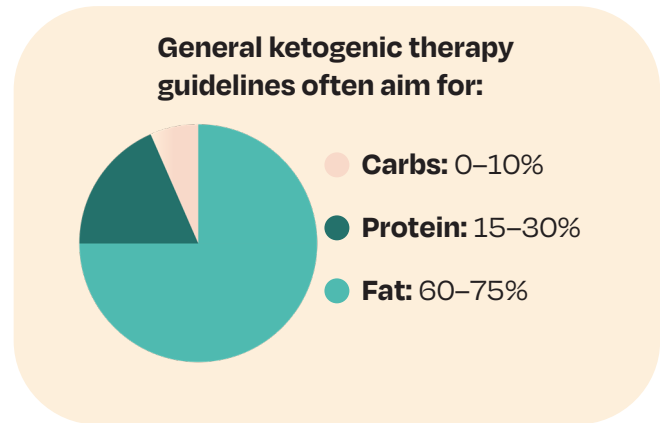
## Set Your Macronutrient Strategy

Tailor your approach to your **body, goals, and lifestyle.**

There's no one-size-fits-all formula when it comes to macronutrients (or "macros") in ketogenic therapy. Your strategy should reflect your preferences, energy needs, and health goals. You can experiment and adapt your macros over time.

Tracking macros means measuring the percentage of your daily intake that comes from:

- Carbohydrates
- Fat
- Protein



These are starting points—not rigid rules. You can adjust based on your physical response and mental clarity.

Here are some further resources:

- [What are Macros and How Do I Calculate Them?](#)
- [How to Determine Your Ideal Nutrient Targets](#)

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## Tracking vs. Intuitive Eating: Both Are Valid

People approach macronutrient tracking in very different ways:

- Some love data and find joy in tracking every gram—weighing food, logging meals, and using apps like [Cronometer](#) or [Carb Manager](#).
- Others prefer a more intuitive approach—focusing on reducing carbs, eating whole foods, and learning from ketone feedback over time.

If detailed tracking feels manageable and motivating, that's wonderful. If it feels overwhelming or stressful, that's okay too. You can still be successful using a more flexible approach.

Many individuals use photo tracking apps like [Ate](#) and [SHYE](#) to log meals and spot patterns by looking at ketone levels without counting and tracking macros.

To learn more about intuitive approaches, check out: [Visualize Your Plate—End Calorie Counting](#)

## Your Strategy Can Evolve Over Time

Ketogenic therapy is a dynamic process.

You might:

- Start with meticulous tracking, then shift to intuitive eating
- Begin intuitively, then adopt tracking later to optimize for performance or symptom resolution
- Go back and forth based on your phase of life, bandwidth, or goals

The key is to find an approach that is sustainable, flexible, and aligned with your lifestyle.



## A Note on Protein: Moderate, Not High

Many people mistakenly think keto is a high-protein diet. In reality, ketogenic therapy is moderate in protein. Why?

Too much protein can trigger gluconeogenesis, where excess protein is converted into glucose, potentially lowering ketone levels.

But getting enough protein is essential, especially if you're active or doing strength training.

Typical guidelines suggest consuming **0.5–0.7 grams of protein per pound of ideal body weight** (equivalent to 1.0–1.6 g/kg)

If you're unsure about your protein intake, check out [How High Should My Protein Be? with Dr. Bret Scher.](#)

# 07.

## Should Fasting Be Part of Your Ketogenic Therapy?

Intermittent fasting (IF)—such as time-restricted eating (e.g., 16:8 or 18:6) or extended fasting—is often used by experts by experience alongside ketogenic therapy, but it's not required. Here's what to consider:

### Potential Benefits:



Boosts ketone levels to help reach therapeutic targets



Supports metabolic health, including improving insulin sensitivity



May help with weight loss, if that's a goal



Often happens naturally on keto, since the diet reduces hunger and increases satiety

### The Role of Autophagy & Mitophagy:

**Autophagy** is a vital cellular process that clears out damaged cells, misfolded proteins, and dysfunctional components. Think of it as your body's natural recycling system—essential for maintaining healthy tissues, including the brain. Autophagy plays a critical role in both metabolic and neurological health.

A ketogenic diet enhances autophagy by mimicking key aspects of fasting—such as reduced insulin levels and elevated ketones. However, fasting, especially when extended to 24 hours or more, tends to amplify autophagy to a greater degree, making it one of the most powerful tools for deep cellular renewal.

Fasting also upregulates **mitophagy**, a specialized form of autophagy that targets damaged mitochondria—the energy processor of the cell—for removal and replacement. This process improves cellular energy efficiency and helps reduce oxidative stress, particularly in high-demand organs like the brain.

While ketogenic therapy also supports mitophagy by activating similar metabolic pathways, fasting typically induces a deeper and more immediate mitophagy response. When combined strategically, fasting and ketosis can work synergistically to enhance both autophagy and mitophagy—supporting cellular repair, brain health, and overall metabolic resilience.

## Fasting and Mental Health:

While fasting can support ketosis and metabolic health, its impact on mental health conditions like bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, depression, or anxiety is highly individualized. There is promise, but more research is needed.

### Talk to a Provider:

If you're interested in fasting, it's best to consult with a keto-informed coach, dietitian, or therapist who can help you:

- Design a safe plan
- Monitor effects
- Troubleshoot any challenges

Fasting is a powerful tool for some—but not essential. The best strategy is the one that helps you feel stable, nourished, and well.

For more information, watch:

[Should You Add Intermittent Fasting to Your Keto Therapy with Dr. Bret Scher.](#)

[Complete Guide To Fasting: Heal Your Body Through Intermittent, Alternate-Day, and Extended Fasting by Dr. Jason Fung](#)

[Intermittent Fasting to Improve Health, Cognition & Longevity | Dr. Satchin Panda discussion with Dr. Andrew Huberman](#)



### Important Cautions:

**Not for everyone:** Fasting may increase cravings, trigger overeating, or worsen mental health in some individuals

**Adaptation varies:** Your ability to fast may improve over time as metabolic flexibility increases

**Listen to your body:** Monitor how you feel physically and emotionally during fasting windows

# 08.

## Choose Your Ketone Goal

There's no perfect number—**only what's therapeutic for you.**

When it comes to ketone levels, everyone's metabolism is different. Two people can eat nearly identical diets and show very different levels of ketosis. That's why it's so important to monitor how your own body responds to different foods, and to observe how your ketone levels correlate with mood, energy, and cognition.

### Recommended Therapeutic Range

For those using ketogenic therapy to treat serious mental illness, most practitioners recommend reaching a daily beta-hydroxybutyrate (BHB) level between:

**1.5 to 3.0 mmol/L**

Keep in mind that ketone levels will vary throughout the day. In the absence of a continuous ketone monitor (CKM), many recommend treating the goal range as an average as levels oscillate during the day. This range is supported by early research and clinical experience, and may offer therapeutic benefits for:

- Mood stability
- Cognitive clarity
- Consistent energy

Some individuals feel best at higher levels (3–4 mmol/L), while others do well with levels just above 1.5. And interestingly, some people can see significant mental health benefits with ketone levels as low as 0.5mmol/L. There's no single target that works for everyone, and targets will naturally change over time. Experimentation with continuous ketones monitors is showing us that ketones vary considerably through the day, so set a target to hit at least once during the day.

#### Keep in mind:

- It can take time to achieve and maintain higher ketone levels—especially if you're still developing metabolic flexibility
- All progress counts. Don't be discouraged if you're not in a deep state of ketosis right away
- Variation is normal

#### Stay Curious, Stay Flexible

Ultimately, the goal isn't to hit a perfect number—it's to feel your best.

- Work with your care team
- Monitor your response over time
- Stay flexible and curious as you fine-tune your approach

To learn more, watch [How to Determine Your Optimal Ketone Levels with Dr. Bret Scher.](#)

# 09.

## Pick a **Testing Strategy**

The best testing method is the one that **helps you stay engaged** and informed—not the one that causes stress or financial strain.

### Choose the method that fits your needs and budget.

Monitoring your ketone levels is one of the most effective ways to personalize your ketogenic therapy. The goal isn't just to see a number—it's to learn how your body responds to different foods, stressors, routines, and choices.

Here are the most common testing methods:



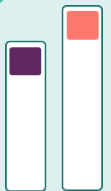
#### **Fingerstick Blood Monitors**

- Measures beta-hydroxybutyrate (BHB), the most reliable marker of nutritional ketosis
- Most accurate, especially for tracking over time as your body becomes more fat-adapted
- Ideal for individuals who want precision or are targeting therapeutic ketone levels



#### **Breath Meters**

- Measure acetone, another ketone body
- Offer insight into fat metabolism
- Less precise than blood testing, but non-invasive and reusable



#### **Urine Strips**

- Measure acetoacetate levels in urine
- Provide a general range of ketosis, not exact numbers
- Very budget-friendly
- Many experts by experience report using urine strips successfully, making them a wonderful viable option when finances are limited

#### **Continuous Ketone Monitors**

Since ketone levels can fluctuate by 1 mmol/L or more throughout the day, continuous ketone monitors (CKMs) may offer the most accurate and practical way to track these changes. When paired with a continuous glucose monitor (CGM), they can provide a real-time glucose ketone index (GKI)—a valuable snapshot of an individual's metabolic state.

Many people report that their mood and mental clarity shift alongside their ketone levels, so having access to moment-to-moment data could offer meaningful insights into the relationship between metabolism and mental health.

Unfortunately, CKMs are not yet widely available. However, if accessibility improves in the future, they have the potential to become powerful tools for optimizing metabolic therapies.

# 10.

## Decide on **Testing Frequency**

**There's no perfect time—only what's meaningful for you.**

When and how often you test your ketones should reflect your goals, lifestyle, and bandwidth. There's no one right way—but the more you learn how your levels shift, the more empowered you'll be to adjust and optimize.

### **Start Simple, Then Personalize**

Begin by testing once or twice a day to build the habit. Consider starting with your testing before your first and last meals, and try to be consistent from day to day. Over time, you can experiment with different times and scenarios to discover how food, sleep, stress, movement, and fasting affect your levels. Many people are surprised to learn that lifestyle factors beyond diet can influence blood sugar and ketone levels. For example, stress and poor sleep can cause glucose levels to rise and ketones to fall. As continuous ketone monitors become more available, we'll be able to learn more about these interactions. If you can get your hands on a CKM, it can be helpful to test against a blood fingerprick for comparison.

### **What if Your Ketones Are Very High? (5+ mmol/L)**

If you're feeling good, this can simply reflect a deep state of ketosis, especially during fasting periods. Some individuals with lived experience report seeing high numbers and feeling great.

However, if you feel nauseous, confused, dehydrated, or unwell, most clinicians will recommend immediately consuming a small amount of carbohydrates, for example, a tablespoon of apple juice. If symptoms continue, it's important to seek immediate medical help to rule out ketoacidosis—a rare but serious condition where both ketones and blood acidity rise dangerously.

Always listen to your body. Numbers are helpful—but how you feel matters more.

For more guidance, watch [When Should You Check Your Ketones with Dr. Bret Scher](#).

#### **Suggested Testing Times (By Goal)**

- **Fasting baseline:** Test 1–2 hours after waking (avoid immediately upon waking, due to the “dawn effect”—a natural early-morning rise in blood sugar and insulin)
- **Meal response:** Test either before a meal or about 90 minutes after eating. To compare, try testing both before and after meals to see how specific foods impact your ketone levels
- **Mood tracking:** Notice how you feel at different ketone levels—early research and lived experience both suggest a connection between depth of ketosis and sense of well-being, clarity, or calm

# Final Word: **This Is Your Path**

There's no perfect formula—only your unique protocol, shaped by your symptoms, lifestyle, values, and goals.

Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good. You just have to keep moving forward, and don't forget to celebrate all progress along the way.

And remember: you're not alone. There's a growing, supportive community of people using metabolic therapies to reclaim their lives—and we're so glad you're one of them. Visit our [THINK+SMART](#) strategies page any time you'd like to dive into what's working for others.

**This journey is yours.**  
We're honored to walk it with you.



**THINK + SMART**  
A Metabolic Framework for Mental Health

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# FAQs

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## Will I have to do keto forever?

Each person's journey with ketogenic therapy is unique, and the answer will vary from individual to individual.

In the field of epilepsy, where medical ketogenic diets have been used for nearly a century, we know that some individuals are able to taper off the diet after a period of sustained remission. Others choose to continue a modified version — such as a low-glycemic index diet or a higher-carbohydrate, lower-fat approach — while maintaining many of the benefits they initially experienced.

In metabolic psychiatry, research is still in its early stages. We do not yet have long-term clinical studies showing how many individuals may be able to modify or discontinue ketogenic therapy while maintaining mental health recovery. Anecdotally, we hear from individuals who have transitioned off the diet and maintained their stability, as well as from those who have remained on medical keto for many years but continue to experience a return of symptoms whenever they go out of ketosis.

Learn more about [ongoing research](#).

## How long should it take—and does it work for everyone?

At Metabolic Mind, we hear from many individuals with lived experience using ketogenic therapy, and the response and timeline can vary greatly from person to person. Some individuals report seeing significant benefits early on within days or weeks, while others may not experience noticeable improvements until two to three months, and, for some, it can even take up to six months to a year.

Research is still ongoing to better understand why people respond differently and at varying rates. As metabolic psychiatry is an emerging field, there are still many important questions without clear-cut answers. However, we do our best to share insights and provide resources based on the information available.

You can watch Dr. Bret Scher's video where he discusses some of the common reasons why keto might not deliver the desired results: [Why Isn't Keto Working for Your Mental Health?](#)

Many studies are currently investigating the underlying mechanisms of ketogenic therapy to help identify whether there are specific biomarkers that predict response. While it's still unclear if there may be a percentage of individuals who are true non-responders, many people report at least some benefit from ketogenic therapy.

Because the potential benefits can be substantial—and the risks are relatively low when done under medical supervision—we encourage individuals to commit to ketogenic therapy for at least a year to fully evaluate its effects.

[Learn more about completed pilot trials and ongoing clinical studies.](#)

## How can I inspire my loved one to try ketogenic therapy?

Ketogenic therapy involves a significant lifestyle shift and relies on the individual's willingness to actively engage with and commit to the dietary approach. Unfortunately, there is no easy answer to this question. You might find this article, [How you can inspire someone to try ketogenic therapy](#), useful.

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# FAQs

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## Is a ketogenic diet expensive?

Not necessarily. While some keto products and specialty items can be costly, many people find that a ketogenic diet can be affordable by focusing on whole, unprocessed foods like meat, eggs, and low-carb vegetables—and by cutting out processed snacks and sugary items.

In fact, some clinicians have successfully helped individuals on SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) reverse disease using budget-friendly ketogenic diets.

[Watch Lauren Kennedy's video on affordable keto](#)

[Read this article from DietDoctor on eating keto on a budget](#)

[Easy & Affordable Keto from Nicole Laurent](#)

**Listen to this inspirational interview:** [Keto Offers Hope in the Bronx: Endocrinologist Uses Diet to Help Underserved Patients Recover Health](#)

## Is ketosis safe for me?

For most people, nutritional ketosis is safe, even with chronic health conditions like heart disease, diabetes, or mental illness. However, if you have a serious medical condition—such as advanced liver or kidney disease, or you're taking any medications—it's important to work with a healthcare provider.

There are rare medical conditions (like certain inborn errors of fat metabolism) that may make ketosis unsafe, but these are uncommon. In general, with proper supervision and monitoring, ketosis can be safely implemented and even beneficial for those with pre-existing conditions.

[Watch our video on ketosis, lab monitoring, and heart disease](#)

[Read this Diet Doctor guide on starting ketosis with medical conditions](#)

## Is a ketogenic diet safe long-term?

Yes—current research supports the long-term safety of ketogenic therapy. Many people report sustained benefits such as improved mood, cognitive function, and blood sugar control.

Claims about nutrient deficiencies or heart risks are often based on misinterpreted data or diets that aren't truly ketogenic. A well-formulated keto diet provides adequate nutrients and typically improves metabolic markers like inflammation, insulin resistance, and triglycerides.

While some individuals see increased LDL cholesterol, this often occurs alongside improvements in overall metabolic health. Research is ongoing to understand this response.

Long-term studies, like Virta Health's five-year trial in type 2 diabetes, show continued benefits well beyond six months. And in mental health, emerging research and lived experience suggest many patients experience ongoing improvements when ketosis is sustained.

[Learn more about the long-term safety of ketogenic therapy](#)

[Virta Health's five-year study on patients with Type 2 diabetes demonstrated continued metabolic improvements.](#)

[Efficacy and Safety of Long-term Ketogenic Diet Therapy in a Patient With Type 1 Diabetes](#)