

KETO 101:

WHAT IT IS, HOW IT
WORKS, AND HOW TO
GET STARTED

I don't know about you, but I *hate* exercise.

We're talking despise, loathe, abhor, detest, can't stand, really really *really* dislike, would-rather-poke-out-my-eyeballs-with-a-toothpick-level HATE.

You know how there are some people who say they don't like exercising but really secretly do?

I am not one of those people.

All my siblings, with the exception of me, have always loved all things athletic. They work out for fun, even on vacation, *even when they don't have to*.

Me? I like books. And writing. And sitting. And Doritos.

Which is how I found myself 2 years ago, on the day after Christmas no less, wondering why my face looked *so puffy* in our family Christmas selfie. I then managed to work up the courage to weigh myself for the first time in almost a year, and discovered that not only was I the heaviest I had ever been, I actually weighed 20 pounds MORE than I did when I was 9 months pregnant. Ouch.

Not only that, I just felt ugh. Unhealthy and out-of-shape. Hating the way I looked in photos and on video, not wanting to look at myself in the mirror, not wanting my husband to see me, and constantly feeling exhausted.

Basically, I felt like crap.

And I realized that something had to give.

In just 3 months, I would be turning 40, and I didn't want to feel like this anymore. I didn't want to feel self-conscious about the way I looked. I didn't want to have to say no to television interviews because I felt too fat. I wanted to feel GOOD when I woke up in the morning, and I wanted to have energy for my kids and for my husband all day long.

And so I set a goal to lose 25 pounds and to get into the **best shape of my life**.

For the first few months of the year, I was ON FIRE. I started weight training 3 days a week, plus running 3 days a week. I signed up to run a 10K on my 40th birthday, and I started having healthy pre-made meals delivered from Bistro MD. They were delicious, and I was feeling great, and in the first 3 months, I lost 17 pounds.

Nothing I tried was crazy or radical—eat healthy, track calories, get more exercise. It's all pretty basic, when you think about it. Because the truth is that my problem was not that I didn't know WHAT to do, or even HOW to do it. My problem was that I just didn't want to. Exercise sucks. Dieting is hard.

But then.....I ended up with a stress fracture, which was incredibly deflating. Soon after that, I had several big trips right in a row, and the weight started to creep back on. Then we went to Washington State for the summer, where we lived in a hotel over the most delicious restaurant in town. By that time, my willpower was completely shot.

I gained back every single pound I had lost.

When we got back to Florida in August, I was ready to get serious, and I decided to go a completely different route. I decided to go Keto.

As it turns out, it was the best decision I made in 2018.

For me, the Keto diet has been incredible. It has completely changed my life—not just what I eat, but my energy levels and even my whole relationship with food. It is truly the first diet that I've ever been on that I feel like I could easily stick with for the rest of my life. I love the food, I love the way I feel, and I never feel deprived.

It has been almost six months now since I first started Keto and I love it more now than ever. At first I was reluctant to talk about it publicly, mostly because I didn't want it to just be another failed fad diet, but these days I can't say enough good things about it!

And, because I've been getting so many questions about it, I thought it might be helpful to write a blog post to address them all. You can also check out my episode 39 on my podcast on this topic as well!

WHAT IS KETO? IS IT DANGEROUS?

The Ketogenic diet, also known as Keto is basically just a high-fat, moderate protein, low carb diet. It is designed to force your body start to burn fat for fuel instead of sugar, which is a metabolic state known as ketosis. When your body is in ketosis it is converting fat to fuel.

And just as an aside, one thing that is important to note is that ketosis is very different from something called Ketoacidosis, which is a very serious complication of diabetes. Because they sound the same, a lot of people get the two confused and think that ketosis is dangerous, but that's not true. Ketoacidosis IS dangerous. Ketosis is not at all dangerous.

HOW DO YOU GET STARTED? HOW DO YOU KNOW IT IS WORKING?

Once you cut out carbs from your diet and switch to this high fat, moderate protein, super low-carb way of eating, it takes about 5-7 days for your body to start producing ketones and to get into ketosis. The easiest way to find out whether or not you've made it into ketosis is to use the **urine testing strips** that you can buy on amazon for less than \$10. The darker they are, the more ketones you are producing.

SO there are some good things and some bad things about this initial stage of keto. The good part is that most people lose weight fairly quickly during this initial transition period, because your body starts retaining a lot less water. So you'll see movement on the scale, and even if it is just water weight, that is always encouraging! The other good part about this transition period is that you really don't have to count calories or anything, so you don't feel super deprived. You can eat whatever you want, as long as you stay below 20 grams of carbs for the day.

The bad thing about this transition period is that it is kind of a big deal for your body to switch from sugar to fat burning, which means there is a strong likelihood that you will feel like crap!

It's called the Keto Flu, and it can be pretty miserable—nausea, headaches, no energy.

Thankfully there is a way to combat the Keto flu, and that is by drinking something called keto lemonade, which is basically water with added salt, lemon juice, and **aloe vera juice**. It replenishes your electrolytes quickly and it helps a LOT.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO SEE RESULTS?

After you have transitioned into ketosis, you will see some initial weight loss right away, but it takes around 5-6 weeks for your body to become what's called Fat Adapted. And basically once you get into the fat-adapted phase, life is AWESOME.

I knew right away when it happened because it was almost like a switch went off, and suddenly I felt amazing and had SO much energy, and I also didn't really ever feel hungry.

Once you are fully fat adapted, most people find that they can add a few more carbs into their diet and still stay in ketosis, which is nice. The weight loss slows down at this point, but it is still steady at about a pound a week.

However, once you are in the fat-adapted phase you can't use the urine strips anymore because while your body will still be producing ketones, they will no longer be excreted in your urine. At that point, the only really accurate way to test for ketones is through **blood testing**, which you do with a machine that is very similar to the blood glucose meters used by diabetics. You prick your finger and then put a drop of blood on the testing strip.

The whole blood testing thing is probably the weirdest part of doing keto, and I can tell you that not everyone does it. I like it, partly because I love measuring things, but also because it has helped me have a better understanding of my own body and how many carbs I can tolerate, because that is different for everyone.

For me, I know that I can have a glass or 2 of wine or some dark chocolate or other foods that are slightly higher in carbs without any issues, and that's really nice.

WHAT CAN YOU EAT WHEN YOU ARE ON KETO? IS IT HARD TO FOLLOW?

I'll be honest--this is the part that kept me from trying Keto for SO long. I was so worried that it was going to be super complicated, or that I wouldn't be able to eat anything, especially since I already have dietary restrictions because I don't eat meat or chicken, only fish.

How was this even going to work?

And it wasn't just the figuring out what to eat that felt overwhelming, but also trying to keep track of all the macros to make sure I was getting the right amount of fat and protein at carbs.

And for the first week, I probably did go a little overboard with planning out my meals and tracking everything, but then I quickly realized that it is really pretty easy to stay keto without that much effort.

It's basically just having the right foods around—low carb vegetables like broccoli

and cauliflower and zucchini, cheese, eggs, and then lots of fat—olive oil, coconut oil, butter, mayonnaise, sour cream, heavy cream, etc. One big change that I did make in my own personal diet was adding bacon. So now I am a keto pescatarian who eats bacon, which makes absolutely zero sense but whatever!

I found that I could order quite a few different foods & specialty items like **cauliflower pizza crusts**, **low-carb crackers**, and **xanthan gum**, which thickens soups without flour, online on Amazon, and I also like stocking up at Trader Joes for things like cauliflower rice, specialty cheeses, and frozen seafood.

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE COOKBOOKS?

Before I started Keto I ordered at least five different cookbooks, but the one that I use way more than any of the others is called **The One Pot Ketogenic Cookbook**. The recipes are so easy and so basic and so good—things like broccoli cheddar soup, shrimp Alfredo with zucchini noodles, clam chowder, cheesy cauliflower rice, creamed spinach, avocado egg salad, and so much more. I really can't say enough good things about that one.

ARE YOUR KIDS ON KETO TOO? WHAT DO YOU COOK FOR THEM?

My kids are not on Keto, but they do eat a lot of keto stuff because when I cook dinner, I cook one meal for everyone. But the great part is that the food is SO good that it really isn't an issue. The only thing my kids really balked at was the Keto pizza, so on pizza night I make ours keto and they have a pre-made frozen pizza.

At this point I probably now have 20-25 different really good go-to dinner options that we rotate through, which is plenty for us because no one in my family really minds eating the same things. I do try to add at least one new thing in each week, but our menu is more limited because of my weird diet restrictions. If you eat meat and chicken, you would easily have far more options to choose from!

These days I do most of the cooking, at least for dinner, which is a big shift for us. When my husband retired 5 years ago to become the stay-at-home dad, it became his job to take care of dinner. But he hates cooking dinner, and he is not at all a meal planner, so more often than not, we would end up going out to eat, which is probably why we both started gaining so much weight!

And so I knew that if we were going to do Keto, I was going to have to be the one to cook. And the thing is I actually love to cook, but most days I would come home SO exhausted from work that the last thing I would want to do is cook! One of the biggest things I really love about keto is that I have so much more energy now, and I don't get that afternoon crash like I used to. So now coming home to make dinner is actually a pleasure. I pour a glass of wine, put on some relaxing music, and just enjoy that little moment to myself in the kitchen. It has been so nice!

My routine for figuring out our meals each week is to plan my schedule on Friday, which I've talked about before, I think in **Episode 15 of the Do It Scared™ Podcast**, and then on Saturday or Sunday I will sit down with my cookbooks and my favorite recipes and plan our dinners for the week, as well as lunches for Chuck and myself. Most of the time we can just do leftovers for lunch, but sometimes we will do some-

thing else like egg salad lettuce wraps or tuna wraps, or **keto bagels** with cream cheese (which are SO good). I usually also plan for one night out—either a family night or date night, but I'll talk more about eating out in a little bit.

So for us, a typical week's worth of dinners might include the following: Broccoli & Cheese Frittata on Sunday, Creamy Dill Mushroom soup on Monday, Taco Salad on Tuesday, Steak (for them) & Salmon or Shrimp (for me) with Creamed Spinach & Cauliflower Rice on Wednesday, Bacon Cheeseburger Skillet on Thursday, Pizza on Friday, and dinner out on Saturday.

Then, once I've put together the plan, I will make our shopping list, which my husband is then responsible for getting from the grocery store. If it was me shopping I would probably just go and get everything for the whole week all at once, but my husband has a strange obsession with Publix and likes to go every day, so I break up the list by days so that he knows what to get on each day. And then when I get home, all the food is there, and all I have to do is cook it, which is awesome!

For those of you who don't have a Chuck to do your grocery shopping, you may want to consider taking advantage of grocery delivery services such as **Instacart** or grocery pickup, which more and more grocery stores are starting to offer.

But figure out what you can eat, and what you are going to eat, then make sure you have a plan so that you're never without keto friendly options.

IS THIS SOMETHING YOU CAN DO LONG-TERM? AND ARE YOU EVER ALLOWED TO CHEAT?

There is a lot of customization that you can do when it comes to Keto, but the most important thing is to make sure it is working for you and your lifestyle so that it is a long term solution, and not just another fad diet.

Because while you will have that initial dramatic weight loss, what you'll be losing in those first couple of weeks is just water weight, which means that if you quit, you will gain it back.

For SUSTAINABLE weight loss, you need to be burning fat, not losing water, and that means you'll have to commit for the long haul, not just for a week or two.

But the good thing is that there are lots of ways you can customize your experience so that you don't feel deprived, so that it does feel like a lifestyle and not just a diet.

Like I mentioned earlier, my husband and I have both been doing Keto since August of 2018, but it has looked different for each of us.

One thing that I've adopted that Chuck has not is something called Intermittent Fasting. Instead of breakfast, I start most days with a fat coffee, which is also sometimes called bulletproof coffee, which for me is 1 tablespoon butter, 1 tablespoon coconut oil or **Bulletproof MCT oil**, 1 tablespoon heavy cream, a splash of vanilla extract, some pink salt, and a lot of cinnamon. It sounds gross but when you blend it up it just tastes like a delicious creamy latte (but less sweet). Then I generally don't eat until lunchtime, or sometimes until dinner if I'm not hungry, and then I eat a nice big dinner.

Chuck on the other hand will eat whenever and also snack quite a bit during the day.

He also thinks fat coffee is disgusting.

Additionally, one adjustment that he has made that hasn't worked for me is that he will take regular cheat days. Every 2 weeks or so he'll take a day off and eat bread and beer and sugar and whatever else he's been craving.

After seeing his success (since he has lost more than 30 pounds and is now at his goal weight) I decided to try that too, even though I wasn't really having many cravings like he was. It was a disaster for me—I went up 3 pounds and really struggled to get back down. So no more cheating for me!

Luckily for me though, I'm not actually tempted to cheat the way that Chuck has been. In fact, the best part for me about Keto is that it doesn't really require any willpower. The food is awesome and I don't have to count calories. I never feel deprived. And I've realized just how important that is for me, because with my job, I do travel quite a bit, which means that I eat out quite a bit.

WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN YOU EAT OUT?

In the past, when I've tried to lose weight, I can sometimes manage to be strong while I'm home and in total control of my diet, but as soon as I get on the road, eating in good restaurants with good wine, I don't have any willpower left to be good. I end up making bad choices and eating way too much, and then, because I've already screwed everything up, I just end up giving up.

But with Keto, it's pretty easy to eat out, and not only that, to eat out and get to eat really, really yummy food! I'll eat a Cobb salad with shrimp instead of chicken and ask for extra dressing, or I'll do a Caesar salad with salmon, or sometimes even fettuccine Alfredo with broccoli instead of noodles. And it is SO GOOD. The only restaurant that was really challenging was an Asian restaurant, and they ended up just making something special upon my request.

I love that I can eat out or go on a trip and it's never a big deal. I will say that I think one of the biggest reasons I'm not tempted to cheat is that the foods I most often crave are actually okay on Keto—I love cheese and avocado and eggs and wine, so I never really feel like I'm missing out.

BUT WHAT ABOUT EXERCISE? DO YOU STILL HAVE TO DO THAT TOO?

Research has shown that when it comes to losing weight, changing your diet is far more effective than simply trying to get more exercise. Thus, switching to Keto can make a huge difference, even without exercise. In fact, most of the research I read recommended NOT to add exercise when you are starting Keto, at least not if you haven't already been exercising.

I had already been working out with a trainer 3X per week, as well as running 2X per week when I started with Keto, so I decided to stick to that routine. For the most part, it has been fine, but the first 5 weeks were a little rough! However, as soon as I made the switch to being fat-adapted, I found that I had way more energy for exercise and working out than I ever had before.

WHAT OTHER RESOURCES HAVE BEEN HELPFUL?

I also recommend **Keto Clarity by Jimmy Moore** and **The Keto Diet by Leann Vogel!**