

Frequently Asked Questions about Very Low Energy Diets

1. How safe are Very Low Energy Diets (VLEDS)?

When used as directed, under the supervision of a suitable health professional (e.g., doctor, dietitian, pharmacist, etc...) VLEDs are a very safe and effective means of weight loss.

2. Who shouldn't use a VLED?

While VLEDs are safe for most adults, people that have had gall stones, gout, kidney or liver disease, or pancreatitis, or have recently had a heart attack or stroke, should discuss the suitability of the program with their doctor before starting.

3. Do I have to have any tests while I'm using a VLED?

Before starting a VLED, your doctor may recommend that you have a blood test to make sure you are essentially healthy.

4. What happens to my body composition during the first week?

In the first week of using a Ketogenic VLED, you will lose the most weight, and your body composition scale will show that much of it is from your Fat Free Mass (muscle, bone and other organ mass). What is lost is not necessarily tissue from your muscle or organs, but their stores of glycogen and associated water.

When we eat carbohydrate-containing foods like grains and fruit, our body converts it to glycogen, a form of glucose that can be turned into energy whenever we need it. Glycogen is stored in granules in primarily our muscles and liver. It is surrounded by water, which is required by the enzymes (catalysts) that break it down into glucose, so that the glucose can be quickly released back into our blood or muscles when required.

For each gram of glycogen we store in our muscles and liver, we also store around three to four grams of water. So, the average person on a ketogenic VLED would lose around 2-2.5 kg when they first start out, as they deplete their body's glycogen stores, and the water stored along with it.

This "water weight" will stay off as long as you are consuming the ketogenic VLED.

5. Will I keep the weight off once I stop using the VLED?

Provided you slowly (over a 9-week period) go back to a healthy diet when you finish the VLED program, and you continue with your physical activity program, you should keep off most of the weight you have lost.

Some of the weight that you do regain will be "water weight" from replenished glycogen stores and associated water.

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6. Do I have to go through all the Phases of the program?

Scientific research shows that a slow reintroduction of food back into the diet after a 12-week VLED program will reduce the risk of weight re-gain. Therefore, for best results, we recommend that you follow all Phases (1 to 4) of the program.

7. How much should I drink while I'm on the VLED?

In addition to the fluids in the VLED, it is recommended that you drink approximately 2 Litres (8 x 250 mL glasses) of additional beverages each day. Suitable drinks are listed in the "Foods and beverages while following the Ketogenic Very Low Energy Diet" handout.

8. Can I eat anything else when I am on the VLED?

What other foods you can consume while on the VLED depends on which phase of the VLED program you are up to. A complete list of allowed foods is in the "Foods and beverages while following the Ketogenic Very Low Energy Diet" handout. Please stick to this list unless advised otherwise.

9. How much oil should I have?

It is important that you have ½ - 1 teaspoon of Canola, linseed or flaxseed oil with each of your main meals to help prevent the development of gall stones and to provide essential fatty acids (omega-3 and omega-6). However, fats and oils are very energy dense (1 teaspoon provides 170 kilojoules or 41 Calories) so don't have any more than this amount or you will not lose as much weight while on the VLED program.

10. What if I am hungry?

You may feel more hungry than usual in the first 2-3 days of starting the VLED program, but your body will soon adjust, and most people surprisingly don't feel hungry after that initial period.

11. Are there any side effects?

When you first start a VLED program, you may feel colder than usual, and you may feel tired, dizzy, irritable, lack the ability to concentrate or have a mild headache. These symptoms should not last long: 2 – 3 days is typical. Let your pharmacist, doctor or dietitian know if they persist beyond 3 days.

Additionally, as the KVLED used in the KnowDiabetes Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Plan contains a small amount of lactose, people with lactose intolerance may experience an increase in wind, bloating or diarrhoea. Addition of Lactaid® or Lacteeze® to each serving of the KVLED should reduce or eliminate these symptoms.

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Women of child-bearing age may experience changes to their periods that should resolve once they have finished the program.

12. Will I get constipated?

The KVLED used in the KnowDiabetes Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Plan provides enough fibre each day for the average Australian woman and man, so you should still have regular bowel motions while following the regimen.

However, if you do suffer from constipation, make sure you drink at least 2 Litres of the recommended drinks each day, and have at least 2 Cups of your allowed vegetables listed in the “Foods and beverages while following the Ketogenic Very Low Energy Diet” handout.

13. I have noticed I have bad breath. Is this normal?

Bad breath is a common problem experienced by people who use VLEDs. It is partly caused by the breakdown of fats into ketones.

Chewing an intensely sweetened (e.g., Equal, Splenda, Stevia, etc.) chewing gum or sugar-free lolly (make sure they are not high in another ingredient like carbohydrate or fat) may help alleviate the problem. Alternatively, you can clean your teeth more regularly and/or use a mouth wash.

14. Can I exercise while I’m on the VLED?

In general, most people can and should exercise while using VLEDs. See the Physical Activity handout for guidelines. If you have any concerns you should discuss them with your doctor, pharmacist, physiotherapist, exercise physiologist or dietitian.

15. Can I drink alcoholic beverages while I’m on the VLED?

No. Alcoholic drinks provide extra energy (kilojoules or Calories) which will counter-act the weight loss process, plus they increase urination which may lead to dehydration and can affect your blood mineral levels which can cause serious health problems. Choose Drinks from the “Foods and beverages while following the Ketogenic Very Low Energy Diet” handout instead.

16. What about social occasions?

If you are on Phase 1 or 2 of the program, you should have your VLED before you attend a social function involving food.

If eating is unavoidable, enjoy the following foods:

- Lean meats like beef, chicken (without the skin), turkey (without the skin), pork (without the crackling), seafood (white fish, shellfish, crabs, lobster)

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- Cooked or raw (salad) vegetables in the “Foods and beverages while following the Ketogenic Very Low Energy Diet” handout.
- Low energy / low kilojoule / low calorie / “diet” / sugar free / soft drinks and cordials, plain mineral waters, or soda waters.

Please note that you should avoid all starchy foods (bread, potatoes, rice, pasta, beans, lentils, chickpeas, savory snacks (e.g., chips), etc...) and alcoholic beverages.

17. What if I am sick?

If you get sick while using a VLED, please contact your pharmacist, doctor, or dietitian.

18. Should I donate blood?

No. Electrolyte levels in your blood may be altered while using a VLED and therefore donating blood is not recommended.

19. Should I keep a food and drink diary?

Yes. A diary will help you keep track of what you eat and drink each day, helping to ensure that you have enough dietary fibre, fluids and other essential nutrients. We recommend the Australian made App [Easy Diet Diary](#).