

Considering Carnivore: an emerging nutritional approach

'Participants cited numerous health and well-being advantages as key reasons for taking up and maintaining the diet.' [Protogerou et al., 2021](#)

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Compiled by

Sarah Rice BSc. (Hons), MCOptom (UK), MHP, NNP



Introduction

Carnivore diets are a subcategory of the ketogenic diet where plant material is excluded and may also be referred to as animal-based or zero-carbohydrate ketogenic diets. This approach is an emerging nutritional therapy that may offer benefits beyond standard carbohydrate reduction interventions for a selection of patients and clinical indications. While specific studies are lacking in number, various evidence streams point to potential mechanisms. Reported benefits appear focused around **gastrointestinal disorders, autoimmune disorders and mental health conditions**. As with any nutritional therapy, a personalised, appropriately monitored approach is advised.

The following papers were among the first to draw attention to the carnivore diet:

1. Lennerz, B.S. *et al.* (2021) 'Behavioral Characteristics and Self-reported Health Status Among 2029 Adults Consuming a "Carnivore Diet"', *Current Developments in Nutrition* [Preprint], (nzab133). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdn/nzab133>.

2. Protogerou, C., Leroy, F. and Hagger, M.S. (2021) 'Beliefs and Experiences of Individuals Following a Zero-Carb Diet', *Behavioral Sciences*, 11(12), p. 161. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs11120161>.

Nutritional Considerations

A common concern is that nutritional deficiency may occur – vitamin C is commonly mentioned. However, in the context of a ketogenic metabolism, vitamin requirements may alter.

1. O'Hearn, L. (2020) 'Can a carnivore diet provide all essential nutrients?', *Current Opinion in Endocrinology, Diabetes & Obesity*, Publish Ahead of Print. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1097/MED.0000000000000576>.

In general, the consumption of animal-sourced foods is associated with [improved nutrient status](#). That said, monitoring vitamin status as well as metabolic health status is recommended to ensure therapeutic goals are being met without adverse effects.

1. Goedeke, S. *et al.* (2024) 'Assessing the Nutrient Composition of a Carnivore Diet: A Case Study Model', *Nutrients*, 17(1), p. 140. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/nu17010140>.

Elimination Diet

One of the core features of the carnivore diet is that it removes food components that can [trigger inflammation](#) or [autoimmune responses](#) in sensitive individuals. An [elimination diet](#) has a number of applications and several types exist with a zero-carbohydrate approach being the most restrictive (and simplest) version.

Autoimmunity and Inflammation

As mentioned above, the elimination of triggering foods may be a key feature of the carnivore approach. Additional benefits of a **ketogenic** exclusion protocol include [regulation of stem cell function](#), [immune regulation](#), and [reduction of inflammation](#) via suppression of the NLRP3 inflammasome.

1. Norwitz, N.G. and Soto-Mota, A. (2024) 'Case report: Carnivore–ketogenic diet for the treatment of inflammatory bowel disease: a case series of 10 patients', *Frontiers in Nutrition*, 11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2024.1467475>.

2. Yar, N. *et al.* (2022) 'Consuming an All-Meat Ketogenic Diet for the Long-Term Management of Candida Vulvovaginitis and Vaginal Hidradenitis Suppurativa: A 47-Month Follow-Up Case Report', *Cureus* [Preprint]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.30510>.

Gastrointestinal Disorders

A carnivore diet may allow the gut to heal by [removing irritants](#), [addressing gut dysbiosis](#), [reducing inflammation](#), and [improving immune function](#). Addressing underlying metabolic dysregulation by reducing [insulin resistance](#) also supports healing.

1. Martin, P., Johansson, M. and Ek, A. (2021) 'A Zero Carbohydrate, Carnivore Diet can Normalize Hydrogen Positive Small Intestinal Bacterial Overgrowth Lactulose Breath Tests: A Case Report'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-148500/v1>.

Mental Health

Improvements in mental well-being are [commonly reported](#) using a carnivore approach, and a recent [case series](#) has drawn attention to the utility of this approach for anorexia nervosa (AN), a psychiatric condition carrying a [high risk of mortality](#).

1. Norwitz, N.G., Hurn, M. and Forcen, F.E. (2023) 'Animal-based ketogenic diet puts severe anorexia nervosa into multi-year remission: A case series', *Journal of Insulin Resistance*, 6(1), p. 8. Available at:

<https://insulinresistance.org/index.php/jir/article/view/84>.

This potentially provocative case series deserves a closer look. AN is strongly associated with [obsessive-compulsive disorder](#) (OCD), and the mechanisms through which a ketogenic approach can benefit mental health conditions (improving brain energy metabolism, reducing neuroinflammation, and regulating neurotransmitter activity) have been [well described](#). Additionally, OCD implicates [altered cerebral glucose metabolism](#) and [insulin signalling](#) in common with other psychiatric conditions. Gastrointestinal disorders like [carbohydrate malabsorption](#) also exist in those with AN, and elimination diets may have utility for [other psychiatric disorders](#). There is some evidence that a [higher fat diet](#) affects dopamine tone in a way that promotes more regulated eating patterns. This, along with other evidence that [appetite and hunger hormone signalling](#) become more regulated using a ketogenic diet, may also contribute to success.

Taken together, these factors, along with a simple diet regime where quality nutrition can be delivered in a small volume, may help to explain why this approach can be successful in this population.

Conclusions

A medically supervised carnivore approach may be applied to promote healing, followed by a phase of reintroduction to identify problematic foods. Decisions about reintroduction should be guided by clinical indicators, patient preferences, and the consideration of competing conditions. A personalised approach to any nutritional therapy is a guiding principle, and many people are choosing to continue a carnivore lifestyle long-term.

Further Resources

The Nutrition Network [reference resource](#) has an extensive listing where you can read more about the application of therapeutic carbohydrate restriction (TCR) for a range of conditions. Nutrition Network offers [training modules](#) where you can learn more about the science and application of TCR for a range of conditions, which includes a specific [carnivore training](#).