

Weight Watchers' Profits Plummet as More People Embrace Ketogenic Diet

Written by [Dr. Joseph Mercola](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Weight Watchers, one of the world's largest diet companies, has seen profits dwindle as more people adopt a ketogenic diet; the company's stock value has dropped by more than 80 percent since its high in July 2018
- Evidence suggests nutritional ketosis is a natural way of eating for health and weight management; babies are in ketosis when born, and breast milk is ketogenic
- Ketones mimic the life span-extending properties of fasting, which includes improved glucose metabolism, reduced inflammation, clearing out malfunctioning immune cells, and upregulating autophagy and mitophagy in your mitochondria
- A ketogenic diet works really well with intermittent fasting. When you eat throughout the day your body adapts to burning sugar as its primary fuel, which down-regulates enzymes that utilize and burn your stored fat
- Not all fats have the same effects on your body, and the fats most commonly found in processed foods are among the very worst. When boosting consumption of dietary fats, make sure it's natural, unprocessed fat found in real foods, such as seeds, nuts, butter, olives, avocado and coconut oil

Weight Watchers, one of the world's largest diet companies, is struggling yet again as shares dwindle amid "competition" from ketogenic diets. In 2011, the company gave up on calorie counting, admitting it was "unhelpful." Now, CNN Business reports people are increasingly turning away from carbs — and diets that promote them.

"CEO Mindy Grossman attributed the problem to the keto diet, a popular eating regimen that makes bread and other carbs taboo. She said during a call with analysts ... that keto is 'becoming a cultural mean' and she even called it a 'keto surge,'" CNN writes.¹

As a result of rapidly shifting consumer behavior, Weight Watchers' stock value has dropped by more than 80 percent since its high in July 2018.² Weight Watchers won't be changing its diet strategy though, Grossman says.

Nutritional Ketosis Is a Natural State

While Weight Watchers appears to view the ketogenic diet as another fad destined to eventually fade, there's plenty of evidence to suggest nutritional ketosis is a most natural way of eating for health and weight management. The same clearly cannot be said for the Weight Watchers program.

As noted in a 2014 article on ketotic.org, “Newborn infants are in ketosis. This is their normal state.”³ The article makes a compelling argument for ketogenic metabolism being “normal and desirable” because babies are in ketosis when born, and breast milk is ketogenic, so they remain in ketosis for as long as they’re [breastfeeding](#).

Ketones — water-soluble fats your liver produces when converting fats into energy — appear to be particularly crucial during brain development.⁴ The article also presents the hypothesis that:

“... [E]xtending the period of ketosis after breastfeeding, by weaning onto ketogenic foods such as homemade broth and fatty meat, rather than cereal, fruit and starchy vegetables, would further promote brain development and reduce risk of disease.”

Ketones Mimic and Support Benefits of Fasting

Indeed, we know that ketones mimic the life span-extending properties of calorie restriction⁵ (fasting), which includes improved glucose metabolism, reduced inflammation, clearing out malfunctioning immune cells,⁶ and reduced IGF-1, which is one of the factors that regulate growth pathways and growth genes and is a major player in accelerated aging and cellular/intracellular regeneration and rejuvenation (autophagy and mitophagy in the mitochondria).

Historically, the generous amounts of food most of us eat simply were not accessible throughout the entire year, let alone 24/7, and evidence shows your body simply isn't designed to run optimally when continuously fed.

Unfortunately, [research by Satchidananda Panda](#) suggests 90 percent of people eat across a span of 12 hours a day, and many across even longer timespans. This is a prescription for metabolic disaster, and will radically increase your risk for obesity and chronic degenerative disease over time.

Part of the problem is that when you eat throughout the day your body adapts to burning sugar as its primary fuel, which down-regulates enzymes that utilize and burn your stored fat. If you struggle to lose weight, this may well be a significant part of the problem — your body has simply lost the metabolic flexibility to [burn fat for fuel](#).

Moreover, research has confirmed that many biological repair and rejuvenation processes take place in the absence of food, and this is another reason why all-day grazing triggers biological dysfunction. In a nutshell, your body was designed to:

- a. Run on fat as its primary fuel, which you do on a ketogenic diet, and
- b. Cycle through periods of feast and famine, which you do when intermittently fasting

Maintaining Robust Autophagy Is an Important Health Strategy

As mentioned, ketones have a biological impact similar to that of fasting, a major benefit of which is accelerated autophagy and mitophagy. [Autophagy](#) literally means "self-eating" and refers to your body's process of eliminating damaged and defective cellular parts that are targeted for lysosome, which then digests them.

It's an essential cleaning out process that encourages the proliferation of new, healthy cells, and is a foundational aspect of cellular rejuvenation and longevity. Because partial fasting also activates stem cells, when you start eating again this rejuvenation impact is further amplified.

However, autophagy tends to slow down with aging, and autophagy defects are known to contribute to a wide variety of diseases, including metabolic diseases, neurodegenerative disorders such as [Alzheimer's](#) and [Parkinson's](#), infectious diseases and cancer. Logically, researchers are now looking at autophagy regulation as a viable way to treat these and other diseases.⁷

Based on the research that has emerged in recent years, I'm convinced that intermittent fasting is one of the most profound metabolic interventions you can do to radically improve your health, as it allows your body to naturally upregulate autophagy and mitophagy to remove damaged senescent cells, including premalignant cells.

It's also an effective way to shed excess weight and extend your life span. The key is to not eat for at least 14 hours at a stretch, as this is the time needed to activate autophagy. Fasting for 16 to 18 hours seems to be the most effective metabolic window for the long term and is something I do most every day.

Fasting, Exercise and Certain Hormones Combat Disease by Clearing Misfolded or Toxic Proteins

In addition to fasting, recent research reveals vigorous exercise can also trigger autophagy and the elimination of defective proteins that contribute to neurodegeneration and other diseases, as do the fight-or-flight hormone epinephrine (adrenaline) and the antidiuretic hormone vasopressin.

Alfred Goldberg, professor of cell biology at the Blavatnik Institute and senior author on the study, told *The Harvard Gazette*:⁸

"Our findings show that the body has a built-in mechanism for cranking up the molecular machinery responsible for waste-protein removal that is so critical for the cells' ability to adapt to new conditions."

This is truly a new way of looking at whether we can turn up the cellular vacuum cleaner. We thought this would require the development of new types of molecules, but we hadn't truly appreciated that our cells continually activate this process."

The study⁹ in question was published online ahead of print in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS). In it, the researchers suggest exercise and fasting may reduce an individual's risk of developing conditions that arise from accumulation of misfolded or toxic proteins, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's being but two common examples.

Is a High-Fat Diet Bad for Your Heart?

While a ketogenic diet is high in dietary fats, it's crucial to understand which fats are good for you and which are not. Most Americans consume harmful fats like processed vegetable oils, which will invariably worsen your health.

So when we're talking about boosting consumption of dietary fats, we're referring to natural, unprocessed fat, found in real foods such as seeds, nuts, butter, olives, avocado and coconut oil. A more extensive list of examples can be found in "[Basic Introduction to Metabolic Mitochondrial Therapy](#)."

Dietary fat serves two purposes. As explained by Jeff Volek, Ph.D., a registered dietitian and professor in the Human Science Department at Ohio State University who has done a lot of work in the field of high-fat, low-carbohydrate diets, dietary fat is a "[cleaner](#)" [burning fuel than carbs](#), as it creates fewer free radicals and reactive oxygen species in the process.

Dietary fat is also a foundational structural component of your biology with one of its primary roles in building your cell membranes. If you're trying to lose weight, training your body to access your body fat is key, or else you cannot shed it. Unfortunately, many have been brainwashed into thinking that all dietary fats are bad for your heart and cardiovascular system.

Healthy Versus Harmful Fats

It's really important to understand that not all fats have the same effects on your body, and that the fats most commonly found in processed foods are among the very worst. One of the most recent studies looking at this found that when mice were fed a "Western high-fat diet," arterial stiffening rapidly developed, and that the primary culprit was oxidized low-density lipoproteins (LDLs).

As noted by study co-author Manuela Ayee, "To our surprise, a very small amount of oxidized LDL dramatically changes the structure of the cell membrane for the worse."¹⁰ The research was presented at the Biophysical Society Annual Meeting in Baltimore, Maryland the first week of March 2019.

According to the late Dr. Fred Kummerow — who researched lipids and heart disease for eight decades and died at the age of 102¹¹ — [oxidized cholesterol](#) is the primary culprit that causes heart disease, not saturated fats from foods such as coconut oil and butter. By triggering inflammation, oxidized cholesterol promotes the clogging of arteries and associated cardiovascular problems, including heart attacks.

And which types of fats are most prone to oxidation? Processed vegetable oils. These oils are also very high in omega-6 polyunsaturated fats which, when taken in large amounts, cannot be burned for fuel. Instead, they're incorporated into your cellular and mitochondrial membranes, where they are highly susceptible to oxidative damage that harms your metabolic machinery.

To learn more about the ins and outs of dietary fats — which are beneficial and which need to be avoided to protect your health — be sure to pick up a copy of my book, "[Superfuel](#)," co-written with James DiNicolantonio, Pharm.D. The following list from Dr. Cate Shanahan, author of "Deep Nutrition: Why Your Genes Need Traditional Food," also details some of the [best and worst fats](#) found in our modern diet.

| Good Fats | | OK But Not Great | Bad Fats | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Traditionally used Fats and Oils Not highly processed, and not refined | | Refined Traditional Fats Label says "Refined" | Polyunsaturated Refined Bleached Deodorized | Trans Label says "Hydrogenated" |
| All Purpose | Caution w/ Heat | Limited Use | Don't Eat | |
| Olive oil | Walnut oil | Refined Peanut | Soy oil | Fake whip cream |
| Avocado oil | Flax oil | Refined Avocado | Sunflower oil | Fake butter spreads |
| Peanut oil | Sesame | Refined Coconut | Safflower oil | Store-bought pastries |
| Butter/Ghee | Walnuts | | Canola oil | Chicken nuggets |
| Tallow&Lard | Seeds | | Corn oil | Margarine |
| Cocoa Butter | Fatty Fish | | Cottonseed oil | Shortening |
| Mac Nut oil | Artisanal grapeseed | | Hydrogenated oil | Restaurant fried foods |
| Coconut oil | | | Refined Palm | Most chips & crackers |
| Almond oil | | | | Most protein bars |
| Unrefined Palm | | | Mostly in Restaurants: | Most salad dressings |
| Palm Kernel oil | | | Grapeseed oil | Most mayo brands |
| | | | Ricebran oil | Most granola & cereal |



DrCate.com
Version Jan 2019

Feast and Famine Cycling Is an Important Component of Nutritional Ketosis

Getting back to the ketogenic diet, one key detail that most promoters of nutritional ketosis overlook, or simply do not understand yet, is the importance of cycling in and out of ketosis once your body is able to burn fat for fuel. At that point, you begin cycling in and out of nutritional ketosis by upping your carb and protein intake once or twice a week.

Cycling in and out of ketosis will negate side effects and is especially important when you're doing strength training. After a day or two of "feasting," you then cycle back into nutritional ketosis (the "fasting" stage) for the remainder of the week.

By periodically pulsing higher carb intakes, consuming, say, 100 or 150 grams of carbs opposed to 20 to 50 grams per day, your ketone levels will dramatically increase and your blood sugar will drop. I go into the details of this in my book, "[Fat for Fuel](#)," for which there is also an accompanying [online course](#) that guides you through the entire program, which is designed to optimize your mitochondrial function.

Ketone Supplements May Boost Results

Ketones made by your body are called endogenous. But you can also supply your body with exogenous ketones from supplements. One example is medium chain triglyceride (MCT) oil, which is readily converted to ketones. Coconut oil is another. However, while coconut oil does contain some MCTs, straight MCT oil is a more concentrated source.

Most commercial brands of MCT oil contain a 50/50 mix of eight-carbon (C8) and 10-carbon (C10) fats. I prefer taking straight C8 (also known as caprylic acid), as it converts to ketones far more rapidly than do C10 fats, and may be easier on your digestion.

Scientists have also created synthetic ketones. In a 2016 podcast,¹² Ben Greenfield interviewed Dr. Richard Veech,¹³ a leading expert on ketosis, senior researcher and laboratory chief at the National Institutes of Health and an inventor of exogenous ketone esters.

In it, Veech discussed the benefits of and uses for synthetic (exogenous¹⁴) ketones, which mimic or replicate your body's natural (endogenous) ketones. One of my personal favorites is KetoFast, a supplemental exogenous ketone powder. Some of the key points made in Veech's interview are that:

- Nutritional ketosis is a survival adaptation, as your brain only has two options for fuel: glucose and ketones. Ketones can also be used by most organs and cells in your body with the exception of your liver, which lacks the enzyme needed to utilize them as fuel, and your red blood cells, which don't have mitochondria, which is where ketones are metabolized.

•An easier, although not necessarily better alternative to nutritional ketosis, can be achieved by ingesting exogenous ketones. There are two types of ketone bodies your body can use for energy: beta-hydroxybutyrate (BHB) and acetoacetate (AcAc). (A third ketone body, acetone, is excreted as waste, primarily through your breath).

Exogenous ketone supplements are usually some combination of BHB salts, MCT powder and ketogenic amino acids such as leucine or lysine. If you use a ketone supplement, follow the package directions for dosage. The best supplements are the ketone esters, and is the one I regularly consume when flying to lower my DNA damage from ionizing radiation. **Ketogenic Diet Basics**

I believe adopting a cyclical ketogenic diet — which means cycling in and out of eating foods high in healthy fats, with moderate protein and low net carbs (think nonfiber carbs) — can benefit most people. It's very effective for weight loss, and as discussed earlier, works with your body in such a way as to improve regeneration and renewal.

Maintaining net carb (total carbs minus fiber) intake at or below 50 grams allows you to enter into nutritional ketosis (the metabolic state associated with an increased production of ketones in your liver, which is the biological reflection of being able to burn fat). However, we are all different in how we respond to foods, so expect this amount to vary from person to person.

Some people can be in a full fat-burning state with full ketosis at a level of nonfiber carbs that's higher than 50 grams, sometimes even as high as 70 or 80 grams. However, if you're insulin resistant or have Type 2 diabetes, you may need to limit your net carbs to as little as 20 or 30 grams per day.

To find your personal carb target, it's important to measure not just your blood glucose but also your ketones. One of the most accurate and least expensive ketone measuring devices on the market right now is [Keto Mojo](#). This will give you an objective measure of whether or not you're truly in ketosis, rather than just relying on counting the grams of carbohydrates you consume.

Using a nutrient tracker will radically improve your ability to understand your ketogenic diet nutrient targets and assess the nutrient value of your food choices. There are a number of trackers available, but my first choice is [Cronometer.com/Mercola](#). That's my revision of the basic Cronometer tracker, and it's already set to default to macronutrient levels that will support nutritional ketosis.

Once you've confirmed that you're in ketosis, start the cycling procedure described earlier, where you add in higher net carbs and protein once or twice a week, ideally on days you're strength training. Intermittent fasting works very well with a ketogenic diet as well, and can further speed up and optimize your results.

[Back to Natural Health](#)