Announcer 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: The keto diet has become one of the most popular diets today. However, this diet is not without controversy. Researchers are studying whether this diet, which promotes eating high-fat foods, could cause harmful effects in the long run. I'm Emily Yeap.

With me today are Natalie Allen, registered dietician and clinical instructor of biomedical sciences at Missouri State University, and Leah Brooke, a Missouri State Dietetic intern. They're here to explain more about the keto diet.

Brooke.

Leah Brooke: The ketogenic diet is a popular trend right now that replaces carbohydrates with more fat in the diet. So, a typical diet has more carbohydrates than it does fat. The recommended fat percentage would be 30% in a typical diet, but this ketogenic diet makes it more around 70% of your diet being fat.

Emily Yeap: The keto diet is not new, according to Allen. Dr. Russell Wilder at the Mayo Clinic designed the original classic ketogenic diet in the 1920s.

Natalie Allen: This diet was originally developed for children that had epilepsy. Because somehow, this diet decreased the seizure activity in these kids. So the diet's been around a long time, but it has not been used in healthy adults for weight management until recently, so this is a new trend that we're seeing in the weight loss world.

Emily Yeap: Why is this diet getting so much attention?

Natalie Allen: I think with any new diet, there's a lot of hype, and certainly celebrities are feeding into this frenzy that we're seeing with the Ketogenic diet. It is pretty controversial for a couple of reasons. One is we don't have a lot of evidence to understand how eating 70% fat in your diet is going to affect the body long-term. We do have evidence from the American Heart Association and the American Medical Association, and several reputable organizations here in the United States that are saying, "We want to limit fat."

 And so then, for us to go and say, "Okay, never mind, we want you to almost double, in some cases triple your fat intake," we're just not quite sure yet how that affects cardiovascular health, or metabolic health. And those things are being studied right now, but research takes time and the answers still are unclear.

Emily Yeap: How does a diet high in fat help with losing weight?

Natalie Allen: First of all, this diet is very, very low carbohydrate, which is a common source of calories for most people. So, we're replacing some of those carb calories with fat calories. And that's not necessarily a bad thing, except that a lot of those carbohydrate foods have vitamins and minerals and fiber and nutrients that your body needs. We know you need B vitamins, we know that you need Vitamin C, we know that you need folate, and those things are typically found in carbohydrate-containing foods. They are not found in oils.

 So, that's a little bit of a concern, nutritionally, on looking at overall vitamin and mineral intake. Another thing that we look at when we look at the weight management is, when you're following the ketogenic diet, the body goes into something called "ketosis." And this is where the body uses fat as a fuel instead of using carbohydrates. It does take a while for the body to get into ketosis, two to three weeks, generally.

 And people following this diet in the beginning are not going to feel good. It's called the "keto flu." They're going to feel weak, maybe nauseous, kind of achy, tired, and that's a very normal thing to happen as their body adapts from using carbs to using fat as a fuel.

 The trick to this diet is, if you're going to follow it, you've got to stay in ketosis in order to lose weight. And honestly? That's pretty hard to do. You've got to be very committed to the diet to make this work. If you're going to try to stay in ketosis and use fat as a fuel, you cannot be eating carbohydrates. It will not work. Otherwise, you're going to be eating carbs and fat, and gain weight.

Emily Yeap: Allen believes it's hard to stick to this diet successfully for the long term.

Natalie Allen: It is tricky. It's especially hard if you have a family or children. We do not want kids doing the ketogenic diet. So they're having to prepare separate meals, it can be difficult to go out to eat, and you're going to have to spend quite a bit of money and time meal planning. If that's something you want to do, then make sure you meet with a dietitian or someone who can help you plan, and also make sure you're getting all the nutrients you need in the diet, because we don't know yet what the long-term effects are, as far as deficiencies or overall health, cardiac and hepatic-wise.

Emily Yeap: If your goal is losing weight, do these things instead of following a diet.

Natalie Allen: Back off on your portion sizes. Balance your plate. Cut off your eating late at night. Exercise, get moving. Drink more water. Those are practical things that most people can improve upon and will lead to weight management.

Emily Yeap: That was Natalie Allen, registered dietitian and MSU clinical instructor of biomedical sciences, and Leah Brooke, MSU dietetic intern. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

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