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INTRODUCTION

When planning your keto meals, it's important to be flexible and to know how to substitute one food item for another.

There might be a number of reasons for wanting to do that:

- you might see a recipe that looks particularly appealing, but in which you dislike one of the main ingredients,
- a product might not be in season at the moment,
- a cheaper alternative might be available,
- you might simply want to switch things up a little and enjoy more variety.

Whatever the reason, substituting one product for another is fairly easy - and in this guide, we'll give you all the details on how to do that successfully.

GENERAL TIPS

1. OPT FOR PRODUCTS THAT ARE SIMILAR

To swap ingredients and achieve good results, you need to choose products that are similar to one another in terms of type, texture & macronutrient content (fats in particular). Taste will always be slightly different, which is why opting for products that have a similar flavor profile is a good idea.

2. YOU MIGHT NEED TO ADJUST THE COOKING TIME

Some foods need a longer cooking time, while others are fully cooked in a matter of a few minutes. Be particularly mindful of the necessary adjustments of the cooking time for vegetables and for different cuts and types of meat.

3. ALWAYS OPT FOR LOW-CARB PRODUCTS

Given that the ketogenic diet is very low in carbs, you need to always stick to low-carb substitutes.

4. SOMETIMES SKIPPING A PRODUCT ALTOGETHER IS EASIER

Sometimes, if a recipe calls for a product that you dislike, it might be easier to skip it altogether (unless it's one of the key ingredients). This is particularly valid for herbs and spices.

VEGETABLES

Vegetables are an important part of the keto diet. They do contain some carbs (and calories), and therefore cannot be considered completely "free", but you can eat a lot of them without going over your carb limit. Green leafy vegetables, such as spinach, are very low in carbs - a serving of 100 g (3.5 oz) of raw spinach contains only 1.4 g net carbs. Additionally, vegetables contain essential micronutrients and dietary fiber, both of which are very important for general health. The more vegetables, the better.

Vegetables are an excellent side dish to any meat, and you can always substitute one vegetable for another, based on your preferences, the season, and on what's available at the moment (or what's on sale). You can also combine vegetables and cook them together.

As the nutritional values of most vegetables are similar, you can swap any vegetable in a recipe for another vegetable you enjoy. If you do this, you might need to adjust the cooking time accordingly.

Here are some examples of swaps you could do:

BROCCOLI – Steamed or boiled broccoli can be substituted for cauliflower. Cauliflower is not as tender, so you should cook it for 5-10 minutes longer or until you reach the desired texture. Brussels sprouts are another alternative. In a stir fry, instead of broccoli, you could use cabbage for its crunchy texture.

CAULIFLOWER - If you don't like or have cauliflower, you can simply use broccoli or romanesco broccoli.

SPINACH – Instead of spinach, in cooked meals you could use Swiss chard, Chinese water spinach or beet greens; all of those need to be cooked for a few minutes longer than spinach. In salads, you could substitute raw spinach with arugula or lettuce (romaine, red lettuce, etc).

MUSHROOMS - Instead of mushrooms (which are technically not a vegetable but fungi), you could use zucchini or eggplant.

LETTUCE - Lettuce can be swapped with watercress, baby spinach, endive, arugula.

ZUCCHINI - You could use summer squash, mushrooms, eggplant or broccoli instead of zucchini.

EGGPLANTS - Eggplants could be replaced by mushrooms for their similar texture and flavor, or by zucchini.

BELL PEPPERS – Instead of bell peppers, you could simply use green or red Poblano peppers, which have a slightly different flavor but overall a similar texture and crunchiness. If you're looking for the slightly sweet taste of bell peppers, you could use some onion instead (in a smaller quantity, since onion is higher in carbs than bell peppers).

A note on nightshades: plants from the nightshade family include tomatoes, eggplants, bell peppers, poblano peppers, and chilli peppers, among others.

Although it's a rare occurrence, some people have adverse reactions to nightshades, which can range from digestive problems (i.e. a sensitivity or intolerance) to an allergic reaction.

If you suspect you might be sensitive to nightshades, it might be worth eliminating them from your diet for a few weeks and then reintroducing them slowly, to see if you experience any adverse effects. Instead of nightshades, you could use other vegetables depending on the texture, flavor and consistency that you're aiming for.

Avocado [2 g]

Gai Choy [2.3 g]

Kohlrabi [2.4 g]

Banana Pepper [2 g]

Zucchini (Courgette) [2.1 g]

Summer Squash [2.3 g]

Tomatoes, Yellow [2.3 g]

KETO FRIENDLY VEGETABLES

[Net carb value per 100 g]

Broccoli Rabe, Rapini [0 g]

Escarole, Curly Endive [0 g]
Baby Beet Greens [0 g]
Endive [0 g]
Tung Ho [0 g]
Alfalfa sprout [0 g]
Sin Qua [0.1 g]
Bean sprout [0.2 g]
Chi Qua [0.3 g]
Olives [0.54 g]
Collard Greens [1 g]
Water Spinach [1 g]
Romaine [1 g]
Butterhead Lettuce [1 g]
Chicory greens [1 g]
Bok Choy (Pak Choi) [1.2 g]
Gai Lan (Chinese Broccoli) [1.3 g]
Celery [1.4 g]
Spinach [1.4 g]
Mustard Greens [1.5]
Choy Sum [1.5 g]

Iceberg Lettuce [1.6 g]

Mushroom, White (Button) [2 g]

Radish [1.8 g]

Chard [2 g]

Arugula [2 g]

Asparagus [1.8 g]

White Radish (Daikon) [2.5
Tomatoes, Red [2.7 g]
Bamboo Shoots [2.8 g]
Chayote [2.8 g]
Bell Peppers, Green [2.9 g]
Tomatoes, Cherry [3 g]
Cauliflower [3 g]
Eggplant [3 g]
Mushroom, Brown [3 g]
Cucumber [3.1 g]
Bitter Melon [3.2 g]
Cabbage [3.5 g]
Yu Choy Sum [3.5 g]
Green Beans [3.6 g]
Okra [3.8 g]
Tomatoes, Green [3.9 g]
Bell Peppers, Red [3.9 g]
Mushroom, Portabello [4 g
Yellow Wax Beans [4 g]
Jicama [4.1 g]

Tomatillos [4.1 g]
Turnips [4.2 g]
Jalapeno Pepper [4.2 g]
Scallion (Green Onion) [4.4 g]
Broccoli [4.4 g]
Poblano Pepper [4.6 g]
Nori [4.7 g]
Cress [4.9 g]
Fennel [4.9 g]
Broccolini [5 g]
Sugar Snap Peas [5 g]
Bell Peppers, Yellow [5.1 g]
Brussels Sprout [5.2 g]
Snake Bean (Yardlong) [5.2 g]
Spaghetti Squash [5.5 g]
Artichoke [6 g]
Pumpkin [6.5 g]
Rutabaga [6.7 g]
Carrots [7.2 g]
Celery Root (Celeriac) [7.2 g]
Beet [7.2 g]
Onion [7.3 g]
Kale [8 g]
Acorn Squash [8.5 g]
Butternut Squash [10 g]
Mushroom, Shiitake [12 g]

MEAT & SEAFOOD

Swapping one type of meat with another can be somewhat tricky, but if you are mindful of cooking times and cooking methods, you'll not have any problems with it.

Different cuts of meat will vary by their fat content, flavor and tenderness. Leaner cuts of meat are often more tender. Examples include chicken or turkey breast, beef fillet, or pork tenderloin. Grilling those types of cuts will yield the best results. Cuts that are less tender, such as chicken/turkey legs, brisket (beef), or pork shoulder, usually are very flavorful and benefit from slower cooking methods, such as simmering, oven baking, or cooking in a slow cooker.

Each type of meat has a minimum safe temperature to which it needs to be cooked; this is the internal temperature that is measured with a meat thermometer. If you don't have a meat thermometer, a visual assessment is also adequate in most cases. Be mindful of those temperatures when swapping one type of meat for another - for example, for safety reasons, poultry is not considered safe if cooked rare or medium rare.

CHICKEN & TURKEY

Regarding chicken or turkey, in different recipes, there may be different cuts to be used - legs, breast, wings, etc. In general, you can swap one cut for another, if that's what you prefer or have available, by keeping in mind that breast meat is quite tender and needs less time to cook than legs.

You can always use turkey instead of chicken and vice versa. If you do that, you should swap similar cuts - for example, you could use turkey breast instead of chicken breast. When making those swaps, stick to the amount of meat as specified in the ingredient list.

Keep in mind that chicken legs and wings are fattier than chicken breast, especially if you keep the skin on. This will change the macros of your dish, if you are eliminating fat, consider adding it back to your recipe another way.

Chicken and turkey need to be cooked to 165°F (74°C) for all types of cuts, including ground meat.

FISH

You can often substitute one type of fish for another, by sticking to fish that have a similar fat content.

If you don't have salmon, in most cases, mackerel, trout or herring (or another fatty fish) will do; tuna can also be used, although it's a leaner type of fish and might become too dry - to prevent that, consider adding a small amount of butter or oil when cooking it. Stick to the original size and weight as per the recipe.

PORK

Lean cuts will be generally more tender; these can be used interchangeably. Examples include fillet, pork cutlets, pork chops, tenderloin. Fattier cuts, such as ribs or shoulders can be either prepared in the oven or simmered.

Pork needs to be cooked to at least 145°F (63°C) or more.

BEEF

Different cuts of beef can be hugely different in terms of fat content and tenderness. It's a good idea to swap types of beef that are similar. Tender cuts are better cooked at high temperatures for short amounts of time - grilling is ideal (3-6 minutes depending on thickness and on how cooked you'd like your meat to be, up to 8 minutes for thicker cuts, if you'd like to have them well done).

Tender cuts include beef fillet, ribeye steak, sirloin, ground beef (with different fat percentages), tenderloin, New York cut. These can be used interchangeably, and you could also use veal instead.

Chewier cuts include brisket, cheeks, short ribs, chuck; again, you can use them interchangeably. These will turn tender and flavorful if you simmer them. Cooking them in a slow cooker overnight is ideal.

You can substitute beef with lamb or veal by using similar cuts. Veal is usually leaner and more tender, while lamb tends to have a very rich flavor (that not everyone enjoys).

Ground beef (lamb, veal) should be cooked to 160°F (71°C) to be safe to consume.

Steaks can be cooked according to preference: rare is at 120-130°F (49-54°C), medium is at 135-145°F (57-63°C), and well done is at 155°F (68°C) or more.

DELI MEAT

In general, deli meats (also known as cold cuts or luncheon meats) can be consumed on keto, although some of them aren't optimal for everyday consumption. For the sake of satiety, it's always better to choose whole, minimally processed food, but deli meat can be a completely acceptable alternative, if you're in a hurry, or if you're travelling, or if you need it for a specific recipe (such as a keto-friendly pizza with pepperoni), for example.

It's important to avoid deli meats that contain lots of dextrose (a type of sugar), or carbs in general. Dextrose (and other carbs) are sometimes used as preservatives, and also to improve taste and texture. Check the labels for the exact carb content.

Nitrites and nitrates are also used in deli meats, and although in big quantities those can be harmful, if you eat cold cuts only occasionally, it shouldn't be a cause for concern.

There are many different types of deli meat, such as ham, prosciutto, sliced chicken or turkey breast, pancetta, pastrami, roast beef, sliced chorizo, pepperoni, salami, and more. You could use similar kinds of deli meats interchangeably, for example sliced turkey breast instead of ham, or chorizo instead of pepperoni.

KETO FRIENDLY MEAT & SEAFOOD

[Net carb value per 100 g]

Beef [0 g]	Turkey [0 g]	Cod [0 g]	Trout [0 g]	Oysters [12 g]
Veal [0 g]	Chicken [0 g]	Flounder [0 g]	Salmon [0 g]	Scallops [5.4 g]
Lamb [0 g]	Duck [0 g]	Sole [0 g]	Catfish [0 g]	Shrimp [0.2 g]
Pork [0 g]	Goose [0 g]	Haddock [0 g]	Bass [0 g]	Squid [8 g]
Venison [0 g]	Hen [0 g]	Halibut [0 g]	Crab [0 g]	
Bison [0 g]	Quail [0 g]	Sardine [0 g]	Lobster [1.3 g]	
Caribou [0 g]	Ostrich [0 g]	Swordfish [0 g]	Mussels [7 g]	
Elk [0 g]	Emu [0 g]	Tuna [0 g]	Octopus [4.4 g]	

For recipes that contain cheese, sometimes there are multiple types of cheese required, you might not have the cheese available to you, or you simply do like the cheese used in a recipe and prefer to make a change.

For the best results when substituting cheese, opt for a similar type of cheese - a hard cheese to substitute another type of hard cheese.

Here are some ideas for substitutes:

- Cottage cheese or cream cheese could be swapped with ricotta.
- Instead of parmesan, you could use pecorino, grana padano, or other hard cheeses.
- Mozzarella and burrata can be used interchangeably.
- Instead of cheddar, you could use gouda or another similar hard cheese.

YOGURT

Yogurt is somewhat high in carbs, but you can still fit some of it in your diet, for its probiotic benefits (for this, opt for yogurts containing live cultures).

Always choose plain, unsweetened yogurt without added fruits, oats, or any other ingredients.

You could use Greek yogurt and regular yogurt interchangeably; Greek yogurt will be generally thicker, creamier and with a higher protein content.

CREAM

Most types of cream are keto-friendly.

Heavy cream and half-and-half can be used interchangeably.

You could swap crème fraîche with sour cream (while the fat content is higher in crème fraîche, in most recipes any of the two would work just fine).

KETO FRIENDLY DAIRY

[Net carb value per 100 g]

Asiago [3.6 g]	Gouda [2.2 g]	Cottage Cheese [2.68 g]
Blue [2.3 g]	Gruyère [0.4 g]	Provolone [2.1 g]
Brie [0.5 g]	Havarti [3.6 g]	Ricotta [3 g]
Camembert [0.5 g]	Monterey [0.7 g]	Fontina [1.6 g]
Cheddar [1.3 g]	Mozzarella [3.1 g]	Goats [0.1 g]
Colby [2.6 g]	Muenster [1.1 g]	Yogurt [4.7 g]
Edam [1.4 g]	Parmesan [4.1 g]	Half and Half [4.3 g]
Pecorino [3.63 g]	Burrata [2.3 g]	Sour cream [2.9 g]
Grana Padano [0 g]	Cream Cheese [2.66 g]	Crème Fraîche [1.8 g]

OILS & COOKING FATS

In general, you can swap different keto-friendly oils and fats as needed; some oils and fats have a lower smoking point, for example extra virgin olive oil and butter, which makes them less suitable for frying or high-temperature cooking.

Here are the smoking points of some common keto-friendly oils and fats used for cooking, from lowest to highest:

- Butter 150°C / 302°F
- Olive oil, extra virgin 160°C / 320°F
- Coconut oil, extra virgin 177°C / 350°F
- Lard 190°C / 374°F
- Coconut oil, refined 232°C / 450°F
- Ghee / clarified butter 250°C / 482°F
- Avocado oil 270°C / 520°F

You can swap butter for extra virgin olive oil or extra virgin coconut oil if you intend to use it for sautéeing or quick frying.

Lard (pig fat) can also be used for sautéeing; there are different types of lard, coming from different parts of the animal, and they'll have varying amounts of flavor. Some are nearly neutral.

If you need to use fat for baking or for deep frying, you can opt for either refined coconut oil, ghee or avocado oil; those can be used interchangeably.

KETO FRIENDLY OILS & COOKING FATS

[Net carb value per 100 g]

Olive oil [0 g]
Coconut oil [0 g]
Grass-fed butter [0 g]
Walnut oil [0 g]
Fish oil [0 g]
MCT oil [0 g]
Animal Fats (including lard) [0 g]
Avocado oil [0 g]

SEEDS, NUTS & FLOURS

Low-carb nuts and seeds are a healthy addition to a ketogenic diet - as long as they're properly measured and tracked. Due to their high caloric density, you shouldn't eyeball nuts - mistakes could cause inaccuracies in your tracking in the range of a couple of hundred calories per day.

It's better to use raw nuts instead of their baked and salted alternatives - nutrients are better preserved in raw nuts.

With nuts, a little goes a long way - if you want to add a touch of crunchiness to a salad or to a dessert, using as little as 5 to 10 g of the nuts of your choice can be more than enough.

In general, you can swap nuts and seeds based on what you like and have available. Not all nuts are low-carb, so you should stick to the ones that are (check the list below).

Here are some ideas for substitutes:

Sunflower seeds can be used instead of pumpkin seeds in salads - sunflower seeds are much lower in carbs (11 g net carbs for 100 g. sunflower seeds vs. 36 g net carbs for the same amount of pumpkin seeds).

Walnuts can be used instead of pecans or instead of hazelnuts, although the taste will be slightly different.

Macadamia and Brazil nuts are very high in fat, so you could swap them, if needed.

KETO FRIENDLY NUTS & SEEDS

[Net carb value per 100 g]

Macadamia nuts [5 g] Hazelnuts [7 g] Chia seeds [6 g]
Brazil nuts [4 g] Peanuts [7g] Sunflower seeds [11 g]
Walnuts [7 g] Almonds [9 g] Sesame seeds [11 g]
Pecan nuts [4 g] Pine nuts [9 g]

A note on peanuts: peanuts, while not technically nuts - they're actually legumes - are still sufficiently low in carbs that you can consume them on a ketogenic diet. Some people decide to avoid all kinds of legumes on a ketogenic diet, and others are sensitive or allergic to peanuts - nevertheless, if you don't have any sort of intolerance for peanuts, you can eat them. Be mindful of quantities and track peanuts diligently, as it's very easy to eat large amounts of salted peanuts. A 100 g (3.5 oz) of peanuts contains 7 g net carbs.

NUT FLOURS

On the ketogenic diet, wheat flour and anything made with it is off limits, simply because wheat is too high in carbs; similarly, any other grains, such as buckwheat, rye, barley, and the products made of those, should be avoided.

If you miss baked desserts, pizza or crackers, you can experiment with nut flours. The most popular ones are almond flour / almond meal, coconut flour (coconut is technically a fruit), and flaxseed meal, which are all quite low in carbs.

With nut flours, it's always best to find a recipe with the specific flour that you have, since each one is used slightly differently. Below you can find some general guidelines regarding substituting wheat flour with low-carb flour alternatives.

ALMOND FLOUR / MEAL

The difference between almond meal and almond flour is that the flour is usually made of blanched almonds (i.e. the skin is removed), while almond meal typically consists of ground whole almonds. You can make almond flour yourself by grinding almonds in a grinder or a blender.

You can use almond flour instead of wheat flour in 1:1 ratio; keep in mind that the final product will have a slightly nutty taste and will be richer in fat. Almond flour contains about 570 calories and about 11 g net carbs per 100 g.

COCONUT FLOUR

Coconut flour is rich in fiber and readily absorbs water/liquids, which means that you'll need to add more liquids (compared to other flours) to achieve a consistency that isn't overly dry. It's usually available at health food stores.

To replace wheat flour in a recipe, use a ¼ cup of coconut flour and one egg for each cup of wheat flour. Coconut flour comes at about 440 calories and 22 g net carbs per 100 g, but the amount you'd need is smaller than other flour alternatives, so don't let the carb count put you off.

FLAXSEED MEAL

Flaxseed meal is essentially ground flaxseed, and you can use it as a thickener along with other low-carb flours, or as a substitute to wheat flour. You can easily find it in health food stores.

When swapping wheat flour with flaxseed meal, use $\frac{1}{3}$ cup and a tablespoon of water for each cup of wheat flour. Flaxseed meal contains about 530 calories per 100 g and only 1.6 g net carbs.

FRUIT

Overall, fruits are too high in carbs to be consumed on a strict ketogenic diet. You could have the occasional small serving. Berries are your best low carb option. In most recipes, you could use berries interchangeably. When swapping fruit, there will be some differences in taste and texture, but if you stick to berries, these will be relatively minor.

Additionally, you could use lemon in different recipes, as well as coconut meat, or dried coconut.

KETO FRIENDLY FRUITS

[Net carb value per 100 g]

Rhubarb, raw [2.74 g] Nectarines, raw [8.85 g]
Starfruit, raw [3.93 g] Guavas, common, raw [8.92 g]
Blackberries, raw [4.31 g] Grapefruit, raw, pink [9.06 g]

Raspberries, raw [5.44 g]

Strawberries, raw [5.68 g]

Gooseberries, raw [5.88 g]

Prickly pears, raw [5.97 g]

Lemons without peel [6.52 g]

Apricots, raw [9.12 g]

Papayas, raw [9.12 g]

Oranges, raw [9.35 g]

Red currants [10 g]

Plums, raw [10.02 g]

Pears, asian, raw [7.05 g] Grapes, muscadine, raw [10.03 g] Watermelon, raw [7.15 g] Cherries, sour, red, raw [10.58 g]

Cantaloupe, raw [7.26 g] Apples, raw, granny smith, with skin [10.81 g] Limes, raw [7.74 g] Apples, raw, golden delicious, with skin [11.2 g]

Physalis (Golden berries) [8 g] Elderberries, raw [11.4 g] Peaches, yellow, raw [8.04 g] Blueberries [11.6 g]

Mulberries, raw [8.1 g] Kiwifruit, green, raw [11.6 g]

Honeydew, raw [8.29 g] Pineapple, raw, all varieties [11.7 g] Cranberries, raw [8.37 g]

CONDIMENTS

Recipes may include spices you do not enjoy (such as curry powder). You can leave these spices out, or try your own blend of spices. Spices have little nutritional value so you can add/remove them as you wish.

Some recipes may call for a small amount of an item to be used as a garnish. As the nutritional value is low, these can be left out if you prefer.

DIPS, SAUCES, AND DRESSINGS

There are many different keto-friendly sauces, dips and salad dressings that you could prepare. Most store-bought sauces are too high in carbs (even the one marketed as low-carb), so we encourage you to make your own versions, with a few exceptions, such as Dijon mustard, which is safe to use if it doesn't contain any honey or sugar.

You could use sauces and dips in any way you wish, and use them interchangeably, if you feel like it (keeping in mind that the texture and taste will influence what they go best with).

DAIRY SAUCES & DRESSINGS

You could prepare excellent sauces and dips by using dairy as a base, for example yogurt, heavy cream, crème fraîche or sour cream as a base (see page 7 for carb count), by adding salt, spices (such as black pepper), herbs (such as dill). You could also add cheese, for example, blue cheese or cream cheese.

You could make yogurt-based salad dressings, by adding olive oil, dill, garlic and vinegar.

MUSTARD, KETCHUP (SUGAR-FREE), HORSERADISH, WASABI

These are condiments that you could buy from the store, and usually do not contain a significant amount of carbs per serving. Always choose sugar-free ketchup and plain mustard (and not honey mustard or any mustard-based sauces). You could use those condiments interchangeably or add them to other sauces and dips.

MAYONNAISE

Store-bought mayonnaise is usually relatively keto-friendly (meaning, sufficiently low in carbs per serving), but it will contain oils and fats that aren't optimal, such as canola oil or sunflower oil. That's why we encourage you to make your own mayonnaise at home and to use a healthier type of oil as a base.

GUACAMOLE

Home-made guacamole (whose main ingredients are avocados, tomatoes, onion, garlic and lime juice) is excellent for keto, and can be used as a dip or even simply as a side dish.

The carb count will depend on the specific recipe.

TOMATO-BASED SAUCES

Tomato-based sauces could be used in different recipes, or to accompany meat. You could even make zoodles (zucchini noodles) instead of pasta and combine it with a tomato sauce.

Tomato sauces can also be used as a dip. There are plenty of recipes for keto-friendly tomato-based sauces, and they would almost always be a better alternative than the ones that you could buy at the store.

The carb count will depend on the specific recipe.

SALAD DRESSINGS

You can make very simple and easy keto-friendly salad dressings by mixing olive oil (or another oil) with vinegar. You could use any type of vinegar you have, by keeping in mind that balsamic vinegar does contain some carbs, which need to be tracked. Additionally, you could add mustard or different herbs to enhance the flavor of your salad.

Olive oil is zero-carb and most types of vinegar also contain no carbs.

KETO FRIENDLY CONDIMENTS

[Net carb value per 100 g]

Mayonnaise [1 g]
Classic Mustard [8 g]
Sugar-free Ketchup [6 g]
Horseradish [8 g]
Wasabi [20 g]