Ketogenic dietary therapy for Doose syndrome

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Doose syndrome, also known as myoclonic astatic epilepsy (MAE) or epilepsy with myoclonic-atonic seizures, is a rare type of generalised epilepsy that was first described in 1970 (1). Onset is usually before the age of five years and multiple different seizure types develop including periods of non-convulsive status epilepticus in some children (2). Appropriate anti-epileptic drug (AED) therapy is usually used as an initial treatment for MAE, however failure of a first medication to control seizures will significantly reduce the likelihood of subsequent seizure freedom (3). International consensus recommendations suggest that ketogenic dietary therapy should be strongly considered in a child with epilepsy which has failed to respond to two or three AEDs (4). Updated NICE guidelines on management of the epilepsies in adults and children also suggest that children and young people with epilepsy whose seizures have not responded to appropriate AEDs are referred to a tertiary paediatric epilepsy specialist for consideration of the use of a ketogenic diet (CG137, nice.org.uk).

The ketogenic diet is a high fat, restricted carbohydrate dietary regime that has been used as a treatment for epilepsy since the 1920s; efficacy has been demonstrated in many prospective studies and a randomised controlled trial (5). This dietary therapy has been shown to be particularly beneficial in MAE where seizures are often resistant to AEDs. One centre reported on 11 children with this syndrome: of six who remained on the ketogenic diet after 18 months, all had over 50% seizure reduction including two who became seizure free and discontinued AEDs (6). A long term follow up study by the same investigators included 38 children with MAE of whom 11 (29%) were seizure free on the ketogenic diet (7).

An alternative more liberal type of ketogenic diet is the modified Atkins diet (MAD). A review of nine children with MAE on dietary therapy reported that seven became seizure free within several weeks of starting a diet and were able to discontinue all AEDs: four were on MAD, 2 on traditional ketogenic diet, and one started on MAD but needed to transition to the ketogenic diet to achieve full seizure freedom (8). An earlier review of 27 children with epilepsy, of whom nine had a MAE diagnosis, also found that some patients saw additional seizure benefits by switching from MAD to the stricter ketogenic diet (9).

Two studies have examined outcomes following different treatments for MAE including diet and medications, although the ketogenic diet was generally only used after failure of many AEDs. The first study reviewed 81 children of whom 26 were treated with the ketogenic diet, 15 (58%) of whom became seizure free (10). The second reviewed 23 children of whom 10 received the ketogenic diet, 3 (30%) became seizure free (11). The authors of both studies concluded that the diet was the most effective of the treatment options in controlling seizures.

The ketogenic diet is increasingly being recognised as one of the most efficacious treatments for MAE (12, 13). As children with this syndrome may be particularly receptive to diet therapy (2), they should be given the chance to try

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this treatment option as early as possible in the course of their epilepsy. We propose that children with MAE who have failed appropriate AED therapy are funded for an initial assessment of suitability for ketogenic dietary therapy. Children who start a diet will require a minimum of three months on treatment to allow adequate assessment of benefit and appropriate fine-tuning of the prescription to a child's individual needs. If seizure control is improved, it is likely that AEDs would be reduced or discontinued after that time. The ketogenic diet is usually continued for least two years if successful.

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