

Why Your Kidneys Shift on Carnivore: The Story New Meat-Eaters Need to Know

Most people eating carnivore don't grasp the kidney mechanics, and they definitely don't understand why the electrolyte drink ratios look nothing like what's in meat. There is no shame in that but it really is something you need to know.

New carnivores often don't grasp why they feel so different when they drop carbs. They're eating meat, getting nutrients, but missing the piece about how their kidneys shift when insulin falls.

The electrolyte dynamics on a low-carb diet are fundamentally different from what someone eating a standard diet experiences, and most people conflate "electrolytes in food" with "electrolyte replacement strategy."

Compared with whole foods like ribeye, LMNT

shifts the balance strongly toward sodium, which is why it is often used as a hydration tool rather than a food source.

When people transition to a carnivore diet, their bodies shift out of carbohydrate metabolism and insulin levels drop. This hormonal change causes the kidneys to excrete more sodium and water, often leading to increased urination and dehydration during the adaptation phase. The resulting electrolyte imbalance. If you're feeling rough during adaptation—fatigue, headaches, muscle cramps, brain fog—those symptoms often point to electrolyte loss. Some people lose enough to feel it acutely; others adapt smoothly and barely notice. The practical move is to measure how you feel and respond. If you feel better when you add salt and electrolytes, you were losing enough to matter. If you feel fine without supplementing, you're replacing what you're losing through food.

Meat does contain potassium, sodium, and magnesium, but the ratios don't match what electrolyte drinks like LMNT provide. For a ribeye, the potassium:sodium:magnesium ratio is roughly 7:1:0.4 based on an 8 oz serving with 653 mg potassium, 97 mg sodium, and 38 mg magnesium. Compared with a ribeye steak, the daily U.S. targets are much higher for potassium and magnesium, while sodium is the one nutrient in the same general range as a sizable serving of meat. For adults, the commonly used daily values are about 4,700 mg potassium, 2,300 mg sodium, and 420 mg magnesium for men or 320 mg for women .

That puts the daily target ratio at roughly potassium:sodium:magnesium = 4700:2300:420, or about 10:5:1 for men, and 4700:2300:320, or about 15:7:1 for women. In other words, ribeye leans potassium-heavy relative to sodium, but it still falls far short of a

full day's potassium and magnesium needs unless you eat a very large amount

When you eat meat, you're getting those minerals in a food matrix. They absorb gradually alongside protein and fat, which slows their uptake but allows your body to use what it needs and excrete the rest. An electrolyte drink is designed to deliver a specific ratio fast, all at once, to someone whose kidneys are shedding electrolytes due to low insulin and reduced carbohydrate intake. On a carnivore diet, especially zero-carb, your kidneys are excreting more sodium because insulin is low. That's why you need deliberate sodium intake—not because meat doesn't have it, but because you're losing it faster than you're replacing it through food alone. So meat gives you electrolytes continuously in a whole-food context. An electrolyte drink gives you a therapeutic dose designed for the acute shift your body makes

when carbs drop. They're solving different problems, which is why some people do fine on carnivore without supplementing, while others feel dramatically better when they add salt and electrolyte drinks.

The question isn't which is better—it's whether you need the supplement on top of what meat provides, and that depends on how you feel.

LMNT electrolyte packets, for just one example, are formulated to deliver a concentrated dose of minerals with 1,000 mg sodium, 200 mg potassium, and 60 mg magnesium per stick pack. That works out to roughly 50:10:3 when the three minerals are compared together. Low electrolytes are often responsible for many of the common "keto flu" symptoms carnivore dieters experience, including fatigue, headaches, dizziness, muscle cramps, brain fog, and constipation.

This is where a supplement like LMNT becomes particularly valuable. This formulation aligns with carnivore goals by providing essential minerals without breaking zero-carb dietary alignment or introducing plant-based additives, artificial sweeteners, or fillers.

For carnivore dieters, sodium needs are often substantially higher than the standard 2,300 mg/day recommendation. Many practitioners aim for 3,000–5,000 mg sodium daily, especially during adaptation, intense training, hot weather, or fasting periods. LMNT makes meeting this target practical and convenient—one to three packets can supply 3,000 mg of sodium without requiring someone to drink plain salt water all day or rely exclusively on heavily salted meat. The benefits extend beyond preventing muscle cramps. Proper electrolyte balance supports healthy muscle and nerve function, hydration, energy metabolism, and cognitive performance,

which are especially important for athletes, hunters, and anyone engaged in physically demanding outdoor activities. For people who track metabolic health metrics like blood glucose and ketones, maintaining electrolyte stability can help ensure that exercise performance and metabolic readings reflect true physiological responses rather than electrolyte-driven artifacts.

While it's possible to obtain electrolytes from animal foods—sodium from salted meat and bone broth, potassium from organ meats like heart and liver, and magnesium from bone marrow and sardines with bones—these sources can be variable and sometimes fall short of daily needs. LMNT provides a consistent, measurable dose that carnivore dieters can use strategically: in the morning to restore overnight losses, after workouts to replace sweat, before bed to support muscle relaxation, or during heat and

fasting to maintain fluid balance.

The key is that LMNT and similar clean electrolyte supplements fill a practical gap without compromising carnivore principles. They allow people to maintain the benefits of a meat-only diet while avoiding the performance, energy, and recovery issues that come from electrolyte deficiency.

Author has no affiliation with LMNT.

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