



MDwise

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Kidney Disease: Changing Your Diet

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Introduction

When you have kidney disease, your kidneys are no longer working as well as they need to. Changing your diet can help protect your kidneys. It can also help you control other diseases, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, that can make kidney disease worse.

This topic can give you some general ideas about how to follow the diet your doctor or dietitian recommends.

Note: These diet tips are not for you if you are on dialysis or have had a kidney transplant. Follow the special diet your doctor gave you.

- Most people who have kidney disease need to limit salt (sodium), fluids, and protein. Some also have to limit potassium and phosphorus.
- There is no one diet that is right for everyone who has kidney disease. Your doctor or dietitian can tailor a diet for you based on how well your kidneys are working.
- It may be hard to change your diet. You may have to give up many foods you like. But it is very important to make the recommended changes so you can stay healthy for as long as possible.
- You need to get enough calories to be healthy and have energy. If you have a hard time eating enough, talk to your doctor or dietitian about ways to add calories to your diet.
- Your diet may change over time as your disease changes. See your doctor for regular testing, and work with a dietitian to adjust your diet as needed.

How to eat when you have kidney disease

These are general food guidelines for people who have kidney disease. Be sure to follow the diet your doctor or dietitian gave you.

Protein

Eating too much protein can stress the kidneys. But if you don't get enough, you can become weak, tired, and more likely to get infections. To get the right amount of protein:

- Talk to your doctor or dietitian to figure out how much protein you need each day. This will depend on your weight, the health of your kidneys, and if you are on dialysis.
- Learn which foods contain protein. High-protein foods include meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs. Milk and milk products, beans, nuts, breads, pastas, cereals, and vegetables also contain protein.

Sodium

To limit sodium:

- Don't add salt to your food.
- Read food labels, and look for hidden sodium. Avoid foods that list salt, sodium, or monosodium glutamate (MSG) on the label. Buy foods that are labeled "no salt added," "sodium-free," or "low-sodium." Foods labeled "reduced-sodium" and "light sodium" may still have too much sodium.
- Avoid salted snacks such as pretzels, chips, and popcorn.
- Avoid smoked, cured, salted, and canned meat, fish, and poultry. This includes ham, bacon, hot dogs, and luncheon meats.
- Don't use a salt substitute or lite salt unless your doctor or dietitian says it is okay. Most salt substitutes and lite salts are high in potassium. Use lemon, herbs, and other spices to flavor your meals.
- Limit how often you eat food from restaurants. Most of the sodium we eat is hidden in processed foods and restaurant food, especially at fast-food and take-out places.

Fluids

If you need to limit fluids:

- Know how much fluid you can drink. Each day, fill a pitcher with that amount of water. If you drink another fluid during the day, such as coffee, pour an equal amount of water out of the pitcher. When the pitcher is empty, you're done drinking for the day.
- Remember that soups and foods that are liquid at room temperature, such as gelatin dessert (for example, Jell-O) and ice cream, count as fluids.
- Count the liquid in canned fruits and vegetables as part of your daily intake, or drain them well before serving.

Potassium

If you need to limit potassium:

- Choose low-potassium fruits such as blueberries and raspberries.
- Choose low-potassium vegetables such as cucumber and radishes.

Phosphorus

If you need to limit phosphorus:

- Follow your food plan to know how much milk and milk products you can include.
- Limit nuts, peanut butter, seeds, lentils, beans, organ meats, and sardines. Also limit cured meats such as sausages, bologna, and hot dogs.
- Avoid colas and soft drinks with phosphate or phosphoric acid.
- Avoid bran breads and bran cereals.

General tips

- Don't skip meals or go for many hours without eating. If you don't feel very hungry, try to eat 4 or 5 small meals instead of 1 or 2 big meals.
- If you have trouble keeping your weight up, talk to your doctor or dietitian about ways you can add calories to your diet. Healthy fats such as olive or canola oil may be good choices. Unless you have diabetes, you can use honey and sugar to add calories and increase energy.
- Don't take **any** vitamins or minerals, supplements, or herbal products without talking to your doctor first.
- Check with your doctor about whether it is safe for you to drink alcohol. If you do drink alcohol, have no more than 1 drink a day. Count it as part of your fluids for the day.

Credits

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