

How To Eat When You Have Kidney Disease (Pre-dialysis)

Why Eating Well is Important

Healthy kidneys remove waste products and extra fluid from your blood. When your kidneys are not able to remove all of the waste products and fluid, the level of waste in your bloodstream rises. This can be harmful and make you feel ill.

Eating well is important to control the buildup of waste products in your body. When your kidneys aren't working well, there are several important changes you'll need to make, which includes consuming:

- moderate protein
- low sodium
- low phosphorus
- low potassium.

Your health care provider may also give you instructions for consuming fewer liquids.

Moderate Protein

It's important to eat the right amount of protein. When your kidneys are not working well, extra protein raises blood urea nitrogen. This causes you to get sick.

To consume a moderate amount of protein:

- Limit high-protein foods such as meat, eggs, cheese and milk to small portions.
- Choose more lower-protein foods such as starches (rice, pasta, breads), vegetables and fruit.

Low Sodium

When kidneys fail, extra sodium can cause fluid to build up. This makes you feel short of breath and increases blood pressure.

To consume less sodium:

- Do not add salt to your food.
- Read the ingredients list on food labels and watch out for "hidden" sources of sodium such as monosodium glutamate ("MSG"), sodium citrate, disodium phosphate, etc. Choose foods labeled with "no salt added," "sodium free" or "low sodium" instead.
- Eat fewer high-sodium foods such as processed meats (ham, bacon, sausage, bologna), convenience foods (canned or dried soups, frozen TV dinners, macaroni and cheese, boxed dinners), pickles, olives, soy sauce, salty snack foods (pretzels, chips) and fast food.

Important: Only use salt substitutes if your health care provider or dietitian says it's OK. Many salt substitutes are high in potassium.

Low Phosphorus

When your kidneys are not working well, phosphorus levels can build up in your blood. High levels can pull calcium from your bones, causing them to become weak and break. High phosphorus levels may also cause itching and bone pain.

To consume less phosphorus:

- Eat less than 4 ounces each day of high-phosphorus foods such as milk, yogurt and ice cream. **(over)**

- Limit cheese and cheese-flavored snacks, processed meats, nuts and nut butters, starchy beans and peas (kidney beans, refried beans, baked beans, chickpeas, hummus) and soy products (soy milk, tofu).
- Do not drink dark-colored sodas. (These contain phosphate or phosphoric acid.)

Your health care provider may also prescribe a phosphorus binder to “soak up” extra phosphorus in your stomach.

Low Potassium

When kidneys fail, potassium can build up. Extra potassium can cause muscle weakness, changes in your heart rhythm and it can cause the heart to stop beating.

To consume less potassium do not eat (or eat very little) of the following:

- **fruits:** bananas, oranges and orange juice, nectarines, dates, prunes, raisins and apricots
- **vegetables:** potatoes, tomatoes, tomato sauce, tomato juice (including V8[®]), Brussels sprouts, dark greens (spinach, Swiss chard, collard greens), pumpkin, sweet potatoes, yams and winter squashes.

If You Need to Drink Fewer Liquids

Your health care provider may give you instructions for consuming fewer liquids. A general recommendation is to limit the amount of water and other liquids you drink to no more than 6 cups (48 ounces) each day.

Ask your health care provider how much liquid you should drink each day.

How to Get Started

If you’re feeling overwhelmed, that’s OK! It’s normal to feel this way. Meeting with a dietitian can help you create a plan to make changes to your eating.

It is recommended that you eat three balanced meals each day. In each meal, make sure to include:

- a small portion of protein
- lower-potassium vegetables such as carrots, cauliflower or celery
- lower-potassium fruits such as an apple, pear or blueberries
- starch (rice, pasta, bread)
- fat such as butter.

Sample Menu

■ Breakfast

- 1 scrambled egg
- 2 slices toast with 1 teaspoon butter
- ½ cup low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt
- ½ cup strawberries
- coffee or tea.

■ Lunch

- 2 ounces roasted chicken on a bun with lettuce and 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
- 1 cup raw carrots and celery
- 6 ounces cranberry juice.

■ Dinner

- 3-ounce pork chop
- ½ to 1 cup rice with 1 teaspoon butter
- ½ cup cooked green beans
- 1 medium apple or ½ cup applesauce
- 6 ounces sparkling water.

Whom to Call With Questions

Call your health care provider or dietitian if you have questions.