

Diet and exercise for better kidney health: Q&A



What diet and lifestyle changes do I need to make to slow down my kidney disease?

The two leading problems associated with kidney disease are high blood pressure (hypertension) and poorly controlled blood sugar levels (diabetes). If you have high blood pressure, following a low salt (sodium) diet is one key factor in lowering your blood pressure. If you have high blood sugar levels, controlling your blood sugar levels with medications, diet, and physical activity is important. If you are overweight, work on healthy weight loss for better blood sugar and blood pressure control.

In addition to these general guidelines, your nephrologist and renal dietitian may have extra diet restrictions. It's important to consult them on your personalized nutrition plan.

Are there tips to help me follow my kidney diet when eating out?

Here are a few tips:

- Try to look at restaurant menus in advance. Many restaurants provide menus and nutrition facts on their website (or smartphone app). Viewing the menu in advance will help you find healthier selections, and also allow you to prepare questions for your server.
- Be mindful of portion sizes. If the restaurant portion is big, consider sharing your meal with someone, or taking half of your meal home. Not only will this save you calories, but it will also reduce the total amount of sodium.
- Avoid adding any extra salt to your food, and don't be afraid to ask your server if your dish can be prepared without added salt.
- If consuming alcoholic beverages, don't overdo it. Always check with your doctor first. The American Heart Association recommends a maximum of one to two drinks per day for men

and one drink per day for women. Remember that some prescription or over-the-counter medications can interact with alcohol.

Dining out can still be an enjoyable experience even on a kidney diet, and hopefully these tips help!

How do I know if I should be following a low phosphorus diet?

If you have chronic kidney disease and are not on dialysis, you may need to restrict phosphorus if lab tests show a high phosphorus level and your doctor recommends a low phosphorus diet. Your doctor will routinely check your phosphorus level to make sure it is in a safe range. If you are on dialysis, you will most likely need to restrict daily phosphorus.

Phosphorus is a mineral that helps keep your bones, teeth, blood vessels and muscles healthy. Phosphorus is found naturally in many foods. It is also sometimes used as an additive or preservative in processed foods and canned and bottled drinks. When your kidney function is decreased, phosphorus levels can build up to unsafe levels in your blood and become harmful to your body. Some people with kidney disease need to follow a diet with less phosphorus than they are used to eating. Your doctor may also prescribe a medication, called a phosphorus binder, to take with your meals and snacks to lower the amount of phosphorus in your blood.

Keep in mind that the nutrition facts label on food is not required to provide phosphorus information, so it's important to become familiar with foods that are high in phosphorus. A few examples of these are dairy products, dark sodas (like Pepsi or Coca Cola), bran, nuts, and beans. You will need to learn how to identify phosphorus additives in processed foods by looking at the ingredients labels for

For more information or to learn about kidney disease prevention, please contact Cricket Health at (888) 780-0253, Monday through Friday from 9am to 8pm EST, or support@crickethealth.com

Diet and exercise for better kidney health: Q&A



words with “phos”, for example, phosphoric acid.

My doctor recommends that I restrict dairy because my phosphorus is high. What alternatives to milk can I drink?

Some popular alternatives to milk include unenriched rice milk and non-dairy creamers. Most unsweetened nut-based milks (for example, almond and cashew) are acceptable. A good rule of thumb is to look for products that contain less than 200 mg of potassium and less than 15% (150 mg) of phosphorus in a 1-cup (8 fl oz) serving. Since phosphorus is not required to be on the nutrition facts label, ask your Cricket Health dietitian for help.

How do I know if I should be following a fluid restriction?

Some patients need to restrict or manage how much fluid they consume. As kidney function decreases, it may become harder for the body to eliminate excess fluid. This may cause a build up or retention of fluid within the body. Signs and symptoms of excess fluid are different for everyone. They range from no symptoms at all to higher blood pressure, shortness of breath, or swelling in the face, abdomen, hands or legs.

If you have chronic kidney disease and are not on dialysis, ask your doctor if you need to restrict fluid. If you are on dialysis, you may need to restrict fluid to prevent fluid overload in between your dialysis treatments. You may also have other health conditions that require you to watch your fluid intake or take medicine. Your doctor, nurse and/or kidney dietitian will help you to determine a safe fluid amount for you.

Keep in mind that fluids include everything that you drink, as well as foods that melt or can be

poured or become liquid. Some examples are juice, tea, ice, pudding, ice cream, and soup.

How can I flavor my food if I am on a low salt diet?

There are many fresh and dried herbs that improve the taste of food without salt. You can use individual herbs and spices or choose a salt-free seasoning blend. Many people are on a low salt diet, and you can find many salt-free options at the supermarket.

Here are a few good options:

- Always choose the ‘powder’ and not the ‘salt’ when selecting seasonings and spices (for example, garlic powder).
- Use fresh lemon, limes, vinegars to flavor your foods without adding extra salt.
- Beware of salt substitutes. These can be dangerous for kidney patients because of their high potassium content. When reviewing any salt-free seasoning, check the ingredient list to make sure that potassium is not listed.
- If you’re unsure about a specific product or ingredient, feel free to ask your Cricket Health dietitian about whether it’s safe to eat.

How much fluid can I drink or how much weight should I gain between dialysis treatments?

It’s important for you to manage how much fluid you gain because fluid retention can cause symptoms like swelling, increased blood pressure or shortness of breath in some people. Minimizing the amount of extra fluid in your body is healthier for your heart.

Your care team will prescribe an Estimated Dry

For more information or to learn about kidney disease prevention, please contact Cricket Health at (888) 780-0253, Monday through Friday from 9am to 8pm EST, or support@crickethealth.com

Diet and exercise for better kidney health: Q&A



Weight (EDW), or weight they think you should be at without additional fluid. This weight may change over time, and should be reassessed if you have symptoms such as low or high blood pressure or shortness of breath. If you are on dialysis, the EDW may change if you experience cramping during dialysis, or if you still have signs of fluid retention even at your dry weight. Typically, your weight before dialysis minus your EDW will tell you how much fluid you have to remove during dialysis.

For patients who dialyze every other day, it is healthier to limit fluid gain between treatments to 1-2 liters of fluid intake. This fluid gain includes any liquid ingested through other items like fruits, vegetables, ice and soup. People who choose home dialysis will dialyze more frequently, and will have less restrictions on their fluid intake, but should still keep fluid intake to 1 L per day to avoid complications.

I'm so thirsty, but my doctor advised me to restrict fluids. What can I do?

Feeling thirsty is a common concern for patients on a fluid restriction. Here are a few tips to help control thirst:

- Avoid salt and salty foods. You may be less thirsty if you do.
- Use sugarless mints, gum, or sour hard candies to help quench thirst.
- Use lemon wedges to suck on or squeeze into your small glass of water.
- Suck on ice instead of drinking water. It still counts as fluid, but will help you limit the amount.
- Keep your blood glucose (sugar) under control. High blood sugar will make you more thirsty.
- Frozen fruits (grapes, strawberries) help to

quench thirst. Eat them slowly as they defrost.

- Spend the hottest part of the day in an air-conditioned room if possible. Staying cool will help reduce your thirst.
- Take your medications with applesauce or mealtime liquids instead of taking them with extra water.

How do I know if I should be following a low potassium diet?

Not everyone with kidney disease has to restrict their potassium intake. Your labs will be reviewed by your healthcare provider, who will share with you whether you need to restrict dietary potassium. If you've been told to limit potassium, your Cricket Health dietitian can help. Maintaining a normal level of potassium is very important for proper heart function, and abnormal levels can be dangerous. A few examples of foods with a high amount of potassium are: bananas, oranges, potatoes, avocados, and tomatoes. If you are on dialysis, you will most likely need to restrict potassium. Hemodialysis patients who dialyze three times per week are typically limited to 2000 mg per day of potassium. Peritoneal dialysis and hemodialysis patients who dialyze more frequently may not require as much of a restriction (usually 3000-4000 mg per day) because they dialyze more frequently.

What are kidney healthy alternatives for holiday meals?

Remember, not everyone has to be concerned about potassium and phosphorus, but here are a few suggestions for people trying to keep an eye on these minerals, as well as trying to keep sodium lower.

- Instead of ham, which is salty, choose roasted pork, turkey, roast beef, or chicken.

For more information or to learn about kidney disease prevention, please contact Cricket Health at (888) 780-0253, Monday through Friday from 9am to 8pm EST, or support@crickethealth.com

Diet and exercise for better kidney health: Q&A



- Instead of candied yams or sweet potatoes, try glazed carrots.
- Instead of potato salad, try pasta or macaroni salad.
- Instead of mashed potatoes, try rice or noodle dishes instead.
- Instead of stuffing made from a boxed mix, make your stuffing from scratch to reduce or eliminate the high sodium ingredients
- Instead of pecan, pumpkin or sweet potato pie, try cake or a lower potassium pie like apple, berry, peach, cherry, lemon meringue. Top your dessert with non-dairy whipped topping.
- If you are going to select a dish that is made with potatoes, then leach the potatoes to lower the potassium content.

How do I leach potatoes to get rid of extra potassium?

Some patients are told that their potassium is too high, based on lab values that they have reviewed with their healthcare provider. You can lower your potassium and still enjoy certain high potassium foods like potatoes by preparing them in a specific way that removes a lot of the potassium. Here's how to do it:

- Peel the potatoes and cut them into small pieces.
- Soak them in a large amount of water for at least 4 hours.
- Drain the water and rinse the potatoes.
- Cook them in a large pot of water until tender.
- Drain the potatoes and prepare.

Are energy and sports drinks safe for me?

Most energy and sports drinks contain additives

that should be limited or avoided with kidney disease. Sports drinks contain extra sodium, potassium, and sugars. Energy drinks (such as Red Bull and Monster) usually contain caffeine or "energy blends" that can cause a significant increase in blood pressure. Kidney patients have different dietary requirements, and it is best to avoid drinks with added vitamins, minerals, and herbals without talking with your Cricket Health dietitian.

Can I continue my vegetarian diet on dialysis?

Recent research has shown that plant-based diets may be acceptable for people with kidney disease. Your healthcare provider and Cricket Health dietitian will work with you to make sure you're getting the right nutrients. You can follow a vegetarian diet, as long as you're eating enough nutrients including protein and some vitamins that are found mostly in animal products.

How will exercise help chronic kidney disease (CKD)?

Exercise can lower your blood pressure. It will help you maintain a healthy weight, or lose weight if necessary. It will improve your cholesterol and sugar control if you have diabetes. Exercise will also help with depression if you are suffering from it.

How much protein should I eat? I hear I should limit it, but also make sure I get enough?

Your body needs protein to help with life sustaining functions such as:

- Build muscle
- Repair tissue
- Fight infections

However, having too much protein can cause waste to build up in your blood.

For more information or to learn about kidney disease prevention, please contact Cricket Health at (888) 780-0253, Monday through Friday from 9am to 8pm EST, or support@crickethealth.com

Diet and exercise for better kidney health: Q&A



Your kidneys may not be able to remove all the extra waste. Thus, it is important to eat the right amount of protein each day. The amount of protein you need is based on your body size, kidney function, and the amount of protein that may be in your urine.

Guidelines for people with kidney disease recommend 0.6 - 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of ideal body weight. Ideal body weight is what you should weigh for your age, height and gender. Based on guidelines, a 120 pound, 150 pound, and 200 pound person would respectively need about 6 ounces, 8 ounces, and 10 ounces of protein (i.e. fish, chicken or beef, egg, etc.)/day.

You can also get protein from plant sources but those are highly variable. For example, there's 20g of protein in a cup of tofu and 15g of protein in a cup of kidney beans, but only 150mg of potassium in tofu and a whopping 800mg in a cup of kidney beans.

It is important to know the protein content of the foods you enjoy, but also the other nutrients that you need or want to avoid. Your Cricket Health dietitian or healthcare provider can tell you how much protein and the best sources you should eat.

Is animal or plant protein better for my kidneys?

Protein can come from animal foods (eggs, dairy, meats, poultry and fish, and also from plants (grains, nuts, soy, and others). It's important to choose the highest quality protein within the type of diet that you follow. Eating more plant-based foods such as vegetables and grains in place of animal-based foods such as red meat may help reduce the risk of developing many chronic diseases like heart disease, and also slow the progression of chronic kidney disease and related chronic conditions. With guidance from

your kidney dietitian, a carefully planned plant-based diet may be helpful in the setting of kidney disease, all depending on your specific needs.

How many times a day should I eat?

Eating frequency is a very individual preference. Spacing out meals and snacks so that you feel good throughout the day, get adequate nutrition, and don't get so hungry that you overeat, are the primary goals. Work with your kidney dietitian to help you with meal planning. When you have a plan in place, it's much easier to eat healthy!

What kind of exercise should I do? How hard should I push myself?

You should check with your doctor first before you start a regular exercise program. The intensity of exercise should depend on your health and current fitness level.

You should aim for a moderate level of activity. Moderate exercise will noticeably increase your heart and breathing rates. You may sweat, but you should still be able to carry on a conversation. You can talk comfortably, but you can't sing with ease. You can feel that you are exercising compared with doing a daily activity like walking at an easy pace, but you are not huffing and puffing.

Examples of moderate exercise:

- brisk walking
- easy jogging
- wheeling self in a wheelchair
- using an elliptical trainer
- biking under 10 miles per hour on flat
- level with few hills
- swimming leisurely
- water aerobics
- ballroom dancing
- gardening
- some housework, such as vacuuming

For more information or to learn about kidney disease prevention, please contact Cricket Health at (888) 780-0253, Monday through Friday from 9am to 8pm EST, or support@crickethealth.com