

Eating Healthy with Kidney Disease

When you are living with Chronic Kidney disease, it's important to make food choices that will keep your kidneys functioning to the best of their ability. You can do this by working with a registered dietitian. It's important at all stages of kidney disease.

"Manage any symptoms that you might have. But also to maintain as healthy of a body as you possibly can."
– Kelly Welsh, RD Dietician

There isn't one specific diet plan that works for everyone with chronic kidney disease. Lab tests help dietitians create a diet plan that's right for you. Rogelio Garcia is a Hemodialysis patient who knows how important eating right is to staying healthy.

"Labs are taken every two weeks and once those labs are done, the dietitian knows to take a look at those labs and look to see what are your phosphorus levels, what are your potassium levels and what are your hemoglobin levels." - Rogelio, Patient

"Soon as kidneys start failing these labs can become out of range and really cause some major side effects and symptoms that are usually taken care of if we get them back into range." – Kelly Welsh, RD Dietician

While no chronic kidney disease diet is the same, there are some common culprits that can harm your health. They include protein, potassium, phosphorus and sodium. Eating the right amount can help control the buildup of waste in your kidneys.

With protein, meats, chicken, fish eggs, how much you can eat depends on the stage of your kidney disease. Early on, you might need to limit protein.

"In stages 1, 2, 3 and 4...a patient's goal is primarily to preserve the kidney function that they have left. Because protein intake, large amounts of it, can be stressful on already stressed out kidneys, we basically recommend just a normal intake." - Kelly Welsh, RD Dietician

That all changes if you are on dialysis, when you may actually need more protein.

"Because dialysis is really great at removing the extra fluids and waste products, but it also takes along some protein with it, your protein needs dramatically increase." - Kelly Welsh, RD Dietician

Potassium is found in foods like tomatoes, potatoes, bananas, chocolate, orange juice, nuts and peanut butter. Potassium helps muscles, like your heart, work.

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But when your kidneys are not working well, too much potassium can build up in your blood and become dangerous.

"If there's too much potassium in the diet it can throw our heart rate, or our heart beat off, causing it to stop in the most dramatic of circumstances. So it's a very important lab to monitor on a regular basis."

- Kelly Welsh, RD Dietician

Phosphorus is found in many boxed foods, dairy products, nuts, peanut butter, chocolate and cola drinks. Too much phosphorus, can weaken your bones and cause other serious problems.

"If we're in Stage 5, phosphorus builds up, pulls calcium from the bones and deposits it in various arteries and organs in our body causing a serious condition called calcification." - Kelly Welsh, RD Dietician

You also need to monitor sodium, or salt, in your diet. Things like processed and fast foods are very high in sodium. You'll also want to limit the amount of salt you add to your own food.

"Too much sodium will mean that our body is going to retain fluid which makes it harder for our heart to work and can increase our blood pressure." - Kelly Welsh, RD Dietician

Because many Dialysis patients start to make less urine, they also have to pay careful attention to how much fluid they drink every day.

"For someone who has to be on a fluid restriction, this would be how much fluid they should be taking in, at most, in a 24-hour period." – Kelly Welsh, RD Dietician

"Not to dehydrate yourself but not also to over hydrate yourself. Because if we're over hydrating we're increasing the workload of our heart, increasing the workload of our kidneys and making it harder for dialysis to work." - Kelly Welsh, RD Dietician

Hemodialysis patient, Venus Dickinson, says it might seem hard at first – but it's all about accepting a new way of eating.

"It was changing your lifestyle to eat things that are more healthy for you." – Venus, Patient

A registered dietitian will help you learn what foods to eat, and what ones to limit, to keep your kidneys working as best they can.