

# Nutrition and Hemodialysis: What do I need to know?



UHN

This pamphlet is about nutrition for hemodialysis patients. Your kidneys are not working at full strength. They cannot remove the waste and fluid produced by your body. You need dialysis to remove the waste and fluid build up.

Hemodialysis cannot completely do the job that the kidneys do. You need to control what and how much you eat and drink. To get the most out of your dialysis treatments and to keep you feeling your best, you need to restrict foods that are high in:

- Sodium
- Potassium
- Phosphorous

You need to eat a diet with high quality protein. You also need to watch how much fluid you drink.

Talk to your dietitian for more information about good food choices to control fluid and waste build up in your blood.

## Protein

Your body uses protein for many reasons, including:

- Building and repairing body tissues;
- Maintaining fluid balance; and
- Providing energy.

Protein makes up 75% of the human body. Without protein, our bodies could not heal after an injury, stop bleeding or fight an infection.

Dialysis removes protein from the blood. You need to eat more protein to replace the protein lost from dialysis. Choose high quality protein, such as:

- Lean meat
- Fish

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- Chicken
- Egg whites

### **Sodium and Fluid**

Salt in your diet is a major source of sodium. Too much sodium causes your body to hold on to fluid. When your kidneys do not work properly, they cannot remove sodium and fluid from your body. As sodium and fluid build up in your tissues and blood it causes:

- Swelling (edema)
- Blood pressure problems (too high or low)
- Problems breathing
- Extra work for the heart

To keep this from happening use less salt when making meals. Eat fewer high salt foods, including processed, restaurant and take-out foods. When you can, eat fresh foods more often.

Cutting back on salt and other sources of sodium will also help you feel less thirsty.

Fluid includes more than just what you drink. Fluid is hidden in some food you eat. For example, Jell-O<sup>®</sup>, ice, sherbert, watermelon, and soup are high in fluid.

Monitor and control your fluid intake every day. Contact your dietitian for more tips to help manage your thirst.

### **Potassium**

Potassium controls muscle function and keeps your heart beating regularly. Potassium is also needed for fluid balance.

Dialysis removes potassium from your blood. But potassium can build up between treatments. Too much potassium can be dangerous to your health. If you have too much potassium in your blood it can cause:

- Nausea
- Weakness
- Numbness
- Tingling
- Irregular heartbeat
- Heart failure
- Sudden death

Some fruits, vegetables and whole wheat products are high in potassium. Some foods that should be restricted in your diet are:

- bananas
- oranges
- tomatoes



- potatoes
- whole wheat breads

Ask your dietitian if you have any questions.

### **Phosphorous and Calcium**

Phosphorous and calcium work together to build healthy bones and teeth. For patients on dialysis, phosphorous and calcium can become out of balance in the blood. If phosphorous is too high, calcium is taken from your bones. This makes your bones weak and easy to break.

Large amounts of phosphorous and calcium in your blood may cause something called Calcification. Calcification means that calcium has built up in your heart, arteries, lungs and joints. These tissues become hard and can cause:

- Itchiness
- Bone pain
- Red eyes
- Hardening of the arteries
- Heart attack

To prevent build up, limit foods that contain phosphorus. Foods to stay away from are:

- chocolate
- nuts and seeds
- processed cheese slices
- baked goods

Your doctor may also prescribe phosphate binders. This medication reduces the phosphorus levels in your blood. Taking your phosphate binders as prescribed, following the dietitian's recommendations and having dialysis regularly will help your phosphorous levels remain controlled.

Your lifestyle, food preferences and work schedule (if applicable) affect your diet. Your dietitian can help you find a healthy balance.

To get the most out of your treatments, ask for your monthly lab results. Monitor how you are doing. Work with your dietitian to make good food choices. This will make your dialysis treatments more effective so you can feel your best.