

Nutrition and Hemodialysis:

What Do I Need to Know?



Information for patients and families

Read this information to learn:

- why you may need to change your diet
- what kinds of things to watch for
- why it's important
- how your Registered Dietitian can help



Why do I need to change my diet on hemodialysis?

Your kidneys are not working at full strength. This means they are unable to get rid of the waste and fluid produced by your body.

Hemodialysis (or dialysis) helps remove waste and fluid buildup, but it can't do the whole job. You may need to control what and how much you eat and drink to get the most out of your dialysis treatments.

To keep you feeling your best, you may need to change some things in your diet. These include:

- protein
- sodium
- fluid
- potassium
- phosphorous

Your Registered Dietitian will help you make a plan that is right for your nutrition needs.

Protein

Your body uses protein for many reasons, such as:

- building and repairing body tissues
- fighting infections
- providing energy

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

- chicken and other poultry
- fish
- red meat
- egg whites



Sodium

When your kidneys don't work properly, they can't remove sodium and fluid from your body. Salt in your diet is a major source of sodium. Too much sodium causes your body to hold fluid.

As sodium and fluid builds up in your tissues and blood, it can cause:

- swelling (edema)
- high blood pressure
- problems breathing
- cramping on dialysis
- extra work for your heart

To keep this from happening, you need to limit the amount of high sodium foods you eat.

This includes:

- processed foods
- take-out foods
- meals at restaurants

Instead, eat fresh foods more often, and try not to add salt when making meals. Cutting back on salt and other sources of sodium will also help you feel less thirsty.

Fluid

It is also important to limit the amount of fluid you have each day.

Fluid is more than just what you drink! These foods are also counted as fluids and should be added in your daily fluid amount:

- Jell-O
- ice cream or sherbet
- soup
- ice cubes
- nutrition supplements such as Boost or Ensure

Monitor and control how much fluid you take in every day. Speak with your Registered Dietitian for tips to help you manage your thirst.

Potassium

Potassium helps control how your muscles work and keeps your heart beating regularly.

Dialysis removes potassium from your blood. If your blood potassium levels are too high or too low, it can be dangerous to your health. It could cause things like:

- nausea
- weakness
- numbness
- heart failure
- irregular heartbeat
- sudden death

It's important that you follow your diet. High potassium foods that you may need to limit or increase in your diet include:

- bananas
- oranges
- kidney beans
- potatoes
- spinach



Talk to your Registered Dietitian to learn how much potassium is right for you.

Phosphorous and Calcium

Phosphorous and calcium are minerals found in our bodies. They work together to build healthy bones and teeth. When you are on dialysis, phosphorous and calcium can become too high or too low. 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 calcification. Calcification means calcium has built up in places inside your body such as your heart, arteries, lungs and joints. These tissues become hard and can cause:

- itchy skin
- bone pain
- red eyes
- hardening of your arteries
- heart attack

To prevent build up, it is important that you have dialysis regularly and limit foods that have large amounts of phosphorus. Foods that are high in phosphorus include:

- chocolate
- nuts and seeds
- processed cheese slices
- specialty coffees

Your doctor may also prescribe a phosphate binder. This medication also helps to reduce the phosphorus levels in your blood. To keep your phosphate levels safe:

- take your phosphate binders
- have dialysis regularly
- choose lower phosphorus foods

If you don't see phosphorus listed on the Nutrition Facts Table, it doesn't mean that the product doesn't have phosphorus! Some food companies don't list the amount of phosphorus in their food products.

Speak with your Registered Dietitian about foods that are right for you.

Phosphate Additives

The food industry adds phosphorus to food for flavour and freshness. This type of phosphorus is called a phosphate additive.

Phosphate additives are easily absorbed in your body and can make your phosphorus very high. Avoid foods that have phosphate additives.

Look for the words **phosphate** or **phosphoric acid** in the ingredients list of your foods.

How can my Registered Dietitian help?

Your Registered Dietitian will work with you to develop an eating plan that is right for you.

Remember: Everyone is different!

Foods you may be asked to limit or increase in your diet may not be the same as other patients on dialysis.

To get the most out of your treatments, ask for your monthly lab results to monitor how you are doing. Work with your Registered Dietitian to make good food choices.

Important: This is not a full list of brands or products. The University Health Network does not recommend one brand over another and is not responsible for any products listed. Please contact each company directly to find out more about their products.

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