Regular Blood Tests for Hemodialysis Patients

Information for hemodialysis patients and families

Read this information to learn:

- why you need regular blood tests
- a list of some regular blood tests
- what they can help show
Why do I need to have regular blood tests?

Blood tests tell you and your health care team how you are doing. Different blood tests check different things. Your blood will be tested at the beginning of every month or more often if needed. The information we get helps us keep track of your health. Please ask your nurse for a report card if you would like to keep track of your blood results.

You will have the following blood tests regularly:

**Albumin**

Albumin is a type of body protein. It comes from the food you eat. If you have a low albumin, it could mean that you are not eating enough protein. You need protein to keep your body healthy and to fight infections.

**Target:** 35 to 50 g/L

**Calcium (Ca)**

Calcium comes from dairy products. It is important to have enough calcium for strong bones and teeth. Calcium also helps keep your nervous system working well.

**Target:** 2.32 to 2.62 mmol/L

**Phosphate**

When your kidneys fail, phosphate builds up in your body. A high phosphate level in your blood can cause itchy skin and bone problems. People with kidney problems should limit foods high in phosphate such as chocolate, nuts and processed cheese.

You may be taking medicines called phosphate binders with meals to help remove the extra phosphate in your blood. We need to check your levels to make sure that your body has the right balance of phosphate.

**Target:** less than 1.8 mmol/L
Parathyroid Hormone (PTH)
A poor balance of calcium and phosphate in your body can lead to high levels of PTH. High PTH causes calcium to leave your bones. This can lead to bone disease.
**Target:** less than 50 mmol/L

Potassium (K+)
You need potassium for your heart and muscles to work well. Too little or too much potassium may cause heart problems that can be fatal. We monitor your levels to make sure that your body has the right balance of potassium.
**Target:** 3.2-5.0 mmol/L

Complete Blood Cell Count (CBC)
A complete blood cell count looks at all the parts of your blood cells. If you are on dialysis, we focus on your hemoglobin (Hb). Hb is the part of red blood cells that carries oxygen to all cells in the body.

Patients in the later stages of kidney disease are at risk for low hemoglobin because damaged kidneys can no longer make a hormone called erythropoietin. You need this hormone for red blood cell production.
**Target:** 100 to 120 g/L

Cytotoxic Antibodies
If you are on the transplant waiting list, you will have this blood test every 3 months. This is the blood test we use to match you with potential donors. We freeze and store your blood sample in the Tissue Typing Lab.
Urea

The urea test measures the amount of urea in your blood. Urea is waste left over from the protein you eat. It is normally removed by your kidneys. Urea levels in your blood tell us if you are getting enough dialysis and eating enough protein.

Ferritin and Iron Saturation

Both of these tests measure your iron levels in different ways. It is important for you to have enough iron to keep your hemoglobin levels up.

**Target Ferritin:** greater than 200ug/L  
**Target Iron Saturation:** greater than 20%

Knowing your lab tests can help you understand what is going on in your body. Sometimes you may need blood tests that are not listed here. Your doctor or nurse can tell you about other blood tests. Ask one of them if you have any questions.

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