

Kidney Disease Lifestyle Management

What do the kidneys do?

Healthy kidneys act like a filter and remove fluids and waste products from the blood. Our entire blood volume is pumped around the body and filtered through the kidneys over 65 times per day to make sure the right amount of wastes and fluids are removed.

What happens when the kidneys are damaged?

When your kidneys are not working properly, waste products and excess fluid build up in your body. Having excess waste products in the blood can cause tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, itchy skin, muscle cramps or weakness or painful joints. Fluid overload can be uncomfortable, causing swelling of the abdomen, feet, ankles, hands and face and may cause shortness of breath, high blood pressure and put stress on the heart.

How does kidney damage affect diet?

Eating the right foods can help control the amount of waste products that are formed in the body and decrease the workload on your kidneys. Eating properly may also help to slow the progression of kidney damage, while helping you maintain a healthy weight and feel well overall.

Diet

Your dietary needs will change depending on how well your kidneys are functioning, and also if you are on haemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis.

It is important to see a doctor and dietitian regularly for the best management of your condition. Regular blood tests are essential to see the levels of waste products in your blood and are the best indicator if you need to increase or decrease certain foods in your diet.

What foods do I need to know about for managing kidney disease?

To manage the amounts of wastes and fluid in your body, you will need to know about:

- Protein
- Phosphate
- Potassium
- Sodium (Salt)
- Fluid.

Protein

Protein is used by the body for growth, healing and fighting infection.

Meat, chicken, fish, eggs and dairy products are the best sources of protein.

When your body breaks down protein foods, a waste product called urea is formed. Eating too much protein can increase the levels of urea in your blood, which can cause unpleasant symptoms.

However it is important to make sure you are eating enough protein for your body to maintain its muscle mass, prevent weight loss and promote proper wound healing.

To ensure you are getting the right balance of protein for you, discuss your needs with your doctor or dietitian.

TIP: Include small amounts of protein with each meal, such as cereal with milk or yoghurt for breakfast, sandwiches with meat, chicken, fish or eggs for lunch and meat, chicken or fish for dinner.

Phosphate

Phosphate is a mineral that is needed by the body, but having too much in the blood can lead to weak bones and cause the arteries to harden.

Phosphate is found in foods such as milk, milk products, eggs, meat, chocolate, wheat bran, cola drinks, nuts, seeds and legumes.

Because some of these foods are essential for a healthy balanced diet, your dietitian will recommend a suitable amount for you to include daily. Your doctor may also prescribe phosphate binders like Caltrate or Alutabs for you to take each time you eat throughout the day. These tablets stop phosphate from entering the blood and help them pass out of the body without causing damage.

Potassium

Potassium is a mineral that is needed for proper muscle functioning. When the kidneys are not working properly, potassium builds up in the blood. Having high potassium in the body can be dangerous and in extreme cases or in very high amounts may cause your heart to stop.

Potassium is found in many foods, especially fruit and vegetables. It is important for you to make sure you are getting the right amount of potassium from foods, so a dietitian can advise you how much of certain foods you should include daily.

Foods High In Potassium:

To manage the amounts of wastes and fluid in your body, you will need to know about:

- Bananas, stone fruit, custard apple, dried fruits, fruit cakes, fruit toast, fruit juice
- Potato, vegetable juices, vegetable soups, tomato pastes, sauces and purees
- Potato crisps and hot chips
- Nuts and seeds
- Baked beans, legumes
- Cocoa, chocolate, caramels, liquorice, golden syrup, coffee
- Lite Salt, No Salt (salt substitutes).

Fluids

The kidneys are responsible for producing urine using the fluids in our body, so when the kidneys are damaged, excess fluid builds up. This is why some people with kidney damage need to restrict their fluid intake. Your doctor will advise you how much fluid you need to drink.

If you have been asked to restrict your fluid intake, drinking too much fluid can cause problems with blood pressure, breathing and heart function. Keep in mind that fluids also come from ice cream, ice blocks, custard, yoghurt, soups, jelly, gravy and other foods that turn to liquid at room temperature.

Sodium

Some people with kidney damage need to restrict their sodium (salt) intake, especially those on fluid restrictions. Your doctor will advise you if you need to cut back on salt.

Sodium is found in most tinned, packaged and takeaway foods, and also added to foods during preparation. Other food items that contain sodium and should be limited in the diet include:

- Tinned meats and fish
- Ham
- Bacon
- Processed meats
- Sausages
- Frozen crumbed fish or chicken
- Cheese
- Crackers
- Bread
- Tinned spaghetti & vegetables
- Olives
- Sauces and stocks
- Frozen prepared meals
- Antacids
- Sports drinks.

Healthy weight and heart

What else do I need to consider for managing kidney disease?

Healthy Weight

To maintain a healthy body weight and prevent malnutrition, make sure you get enough nutrition from foods to provide your body with the energy it needs.

Monitoring your body weight regularly will give you an indication of whether you are eating too little or too much food. Fluid build-up can account for short-term fluctuations of a few kilograms of body weight, so longer term measurements will be a better indicator of your weight status.

If you find your appetite or weight decreases significantly, see your doctor or dietitian for advice regarding the best foods and eating strategies for you.

Healthy Heart

To maintain a healthy heart and prevent high blood cholesterol levels, limit foods that are high in saturated fats like butter, cream, fat and skin on meats, full cream dairy products and takeaways.

Replacing these foods with healthy vegetable oils like canola and olive oil and eating fish regularly will help to control your blood cholesterol levels.

Eating out

You can still enjoy a healthy social life that includes occasional indulgences like eating out. Knowing what to look for on menus and foods to avoid will help you choose what's best for you.

Italian:

- Choose pasta with garlic, parsley, butter or olive oil. Tomato based sauces may be high in potassium, while creamy or cheesy sauces may be high in sodium and phosphate
- Garlic or herb bread and a side salad with light lemon and olive oil dressing are good accompaniments to your meal.

Chinese:

- Avoid sauces such as soy, oyster, blackbean, hoisin and Szechwan which are high in sodium
- Choose dishes without sauce or ask them to use less sauce in cooking
- Choose plain boiled rice, steamed or braised meats and sauces like plum, lemon, orange and sweet and sour which may be lower in sodium.

Takeaways:

- Avoid pre-made foods such as sausage rolls or meat pies, instead choosing options that are made to order. Suitable choices may include:
 - Steak burger with no sauce
 - Sandwiches filled with fresh meats, chicken or egg
 - Crumbed fish with lemon juice instead of salt
 - Skinless BBQ chicken.

Meal ideas

Putting it all together and knowing what foods to choose and limit can be difficult, so here are some easy meal ideas. Remember a dietitian can provide you with a list of specific foods you should include in your diet to suit your individual needs.

Breakfast:

Puffed wheat, rice or corn cereal with low fat milk.

White bread toast with eggs.

Lunch:

White bread sandwich with lean meats, egg or tuna in springwater, low fat mayonnaise and lettuce, cucumber, capsicum, celery and carrot.

Dinner:

Lean meat with pasta or rice and vegetables like zucchini, peas, onion, mushroom, capsicum, eggplant, tinned corn, green beans and squash.

Snacks:

Soy yoghurt, fruits such as fresh berries, passionfruit, tinned peach, pear or apple, vanilla wafers, low salt corn chips, white chocolate, low fat ice cream, unsalted crackers, toast with honey or jam.

Exercise tips

By choosing the right types and amounts of foods, you can help ensure that you feel your best while maintaining a healthy weight. To maintain a healthy lifestyle, it is also important to stay physically active. Exercise can help to increase your strength and endurance, prevent fatigue and reduce stress and depression.

Enjoying moderate intensity exercise at least three times a week is recommended for the best results but check with your doctor before starting a regular exercise routine. A doctor or dietitian can advise you if your dietary needs require a change with increased exercise.

You should not exercise if:

- You have a fever or feel ill, weak or tired
- You have changed your dialysis schedule or medications
- You have eaten too much
- The weather is very hot and humid, unless you are in air-conditioning.

Lifestyle tips

Work:

When you are medically stable, there is no reason to change your daily routine, including work. Taking care of your physical and emotional well-being will help you to cope with everyday activities. Preparing and planning your meals at home can help you manage your dietary requirements and resist temptation for foods that are best avoided.

Sex life:

Kidney disease may cause physical and emotional changes that can affect your sex life. The physical changes that occur in your body when your kidneys are damaged and medicines you may be taking can cause loss of interest in sex or reduce sexual ability.

Normal sexual activity is safe for people with kidney disease, but if you are worried about this you should speak to your doctor. Other activities such as hugging, touching and kissing can help you and your partner maintain a feeling of closeness.

Travel:

When planning a trip away, make sure you will be able to manage your requirement for things like food and medicines. People on dialysis will need to arrange dialysis services in the areas being visited. Taking a supply of familiar foods that you know can be included in your diet will help you make better choices for optimal management of your condition.

TIP: Feelings of anxiety or depression are not unusual following a diagnosis of kidney disease, so share your feelings with family members, friends or your doctor or dietitian.