

# How to Eat If You Have Kidney Disease

Kidneys remove waste products from your body. When your kidneys do not work well, waste products can rise to unsafe levels. Certain minerals in your blood, such as sodium, potassium and phosphorus, may also rise to dangerous levels if your kidneys cannot remove them.

For people with chronic kidney disease, dialysis can help remove some of the waste. But you still need to know how to keep sodium, potassium and phosphorus levels low. You can do this by watching what you eat.

Talk to your healthcare team about what you need for good nutrition. They may also talk with you about protein, calcium and fluid in your diet.

If you have chronic kidney disease and prefer to eat foods common in African American culture, you have options. This information explains what problem ingredients to watch for and which foods to choose instead.

## Sodium in your diet

To work well, your body needs sodium, a mineral. But high sodium levels can lead to high blood pressure and problems with managing your weight. It can also cause your body to hold onto fluid.

### Foods with sodium

Some people say “salt” when they talk about sodium. It is found in table salt and some types of seasoning.

Sodium is in many of the foods we eat. Some foods can naturally have a lot of sodium in them. Fast food and packaged food (such as chips) have a lot of sodium in them.

**These “salty 6” food groups have a lot of sodium.**

**Try to limit these foods in your diet:**

- Breads and rolls
- Cold cuts and processed meats (bacon, sausage, hot dogs)
- Pizza
- Burritos and tacos
- Canned soup
- Sandwiches and burgers



### Choose lower-sodium foods

These foods have lower sodium levels. Choose:

- Seasonings without salt/sodium, phosphorus or potassium
- Fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables
- Fresh meat, poultry and seafood
- Air-popped popcorn
- Unsalted nuts
- Low- and reduced-sodium frozen dinners, peanut butter and dressing

## Phosphorous in your diet

Phosphorous is a type of mineral in your bones. It works with calcium, another mineral, to keep your bones strong and healthy.

High phosphorous levels can weaken your bones. Over time, high phosphorous levels may cause a heart attack or stroke, and may lead to death.

### Foods with phosphorous

You should know how much phosphorous is in the things you eat and drink. Try to limit these foods in your diet:

- Beer/ale, dark colas and some bottled iced tea
- Bran cereals and oatmeal
- Processed meat, poultry and fish
- Dairy foods (cheese, custard, milk, ice cream)
- Beans, lentils and nuts



### Choose lower-phosphorus foods

These foods have lower phosphorous levels.

Choose:

- Home-brewed iced tea
- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Rice milk (not enriched)
- Pasta and rice
- Corn and rice cereals

## Potassium in your diet

Potassium is a mineral that helps your muscles work. It also helps your heart beat.

High levels of potassium in your body can cause heart problems.

### Foods with potassium

Potassium is found in many of the foods we eat. Try to limit these foods in your diet:

- Bananas
- Avocados
- Dried fruit
- Baked beans, refried beans and black beans
- Cooked broccoli and spinach
- Potatoes
- Tomatoes and tomato sauce
- Chocolate



### Choose lower-potassium foods

These foods have lower potassium levels.

Choose:

- Cooked rice and wheat cereals
- Rice milk (not enriched)
- Pasta
- White rice
- Okra and greens (collard, mustard)
- Peppers

## What you can do to eat healthy

Follow these guidelines for a healthy diet to protect your kidneys.

### Check food labels

Read food labels to see how much sodium, phosphorous and potassium is in the food you buy and cook. Try to limit the foods you eat that have sodium, phosphorous and potassium.

### Check for additives

Many foods and drinks have phosphorous and potassium as a type of preservative. Be sure to look at ingredients in these items that commonly have a lot of preservatives:

- Canned and dried foods
- Enhanced meat and chicken products
- Cereal bars

If you see phosphorous and potassium additives in the list of ingredients on a label, limit how much of that food you eat.

### Talk with your care team

Be sure to talk to your physician, advanced practice provider or dietitian about your own nutrition needs. If you do not understand what you need to do, ask them.

Here are some important questions to ask your care team:

- What type of diet is best for me?
- How does my medical condition affect what I should eat?
- Am I taking any medications that could affect my mineral (potassium, phosphorous or sodium) levels?
- What are my safe mineral levels?
- How can I find the amount of minerals in the foods I eat?

### Make a nutrition plan

Create goals that you can stick to. Think about the foods you eat now and what you can do to reduce the amount of sodium, phosphorus and potassium you eat.

#### Limit sodium

- What high-sodium foods do I eat regularly?
- How can I limit these foods?
- What low-sodium foods can I eat instead?

#### Limit phosphorus

- What high-phosphorus foods do I eat regularly?
- How can I limit these foods?
- What low-phosphorous foods can I eat instead?

#### Limit potassium

- What high-potassium foods do I eat regularly?
- How can I limit these foods?
- What low-potassium foods can I eat instead?

If you have any questions, please ask your physician to refer you to a Northwestern Medicine dietitian. Or, ask to talk to one of the registered dietitians at your dialysis site.

---

You can find useful information on these websites and apps for your mobile device:

---

#### National Kidney Foundation

- [kidney.org](https://www.kidney.org) - useful nutrition information
- **My Food Coach**<sup>®</sup> - app to track the foods you eat

**Bitesnap**<sup>®</sup> - app that shows how much sodium, potassium and other nutrients are in the foods you eat

---

