

CKD Nutrition Starter Guide

From Diagnosis to Your Dietitian Appointment

Prepared by Jennifer Mann, MS, RD, CSR

✓ Board Certified Renal Nutrition Specialist



Quick Start: Your Top 3 Priorities



1. Focus on Sodium First

Reducing sodium is a safe first step for most people. Aim for less than 2,300 mg per day.



2. Don't Avoid Potassium Yet

Not everyone needs potassium restriction. Wait for your lab results before limiting these foods.



3. Wait for Your Dietitian

Your needs are unique. Don't make drastic changes until you meet with your Renal Dietitian.



Welcome

If you've recently been diagnosed with Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD), you likely have many questions about what you can and cannot eat. This guide will help you understand the basics of kidney-friendly nutrition until you meet with your Renal Dietitian, who will create a personalized plan based on your specific needs.

Important: This guide provides general information only. Nutrition needs vary greatly depending on your CKD stage, lab values, and other health conditions. Always follow your healthcare team's specific recommendations.



Understanding Why Nutrition Matters

Your kidneys filter waste products from your blood. When they're not working at full capacity, certain nutrients can build up to unhealthy levels. The good news is that proper nutrition can:

- Slow the progression of kidney disease
- Help you feel better and have more energy
- Reduce complications
- Protect your heart health
- Maintain your nutritional status



The Main Nutrients to Know About

1. Protein

Why it matters: Your body needs protein, but when kidneys aren't working well, protein breakdown creates waste products that can be harder to remove.

General guidance:

- You may need to adjust the amount of overall protein you are eating
- Focus on: lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs. Try to only have these animal based proteins at one meal per day
- Your dietitian will calculate your exact protein needs
- Don't severely restrict protein on your own—this can lead to malnutrition

2. Sodium (Salt)

Why it matters: Too much sodium can raise blood pressure and cause fluid retention, making your kidneys work harder.

General guidance:

- Aim for less than 2,300 mg per day (about 1 teaspoon of salt)
- Limit processed and packaged foods
- Cook at home when possible
- Use herbs and spices instead of salt
- Read nutrition labels—sodium hides in unexpected places

High-Sodium Foods to Limit:

- Canned soups and vegetables
- Deli and cured meats
- Frozen dinners
- Restaurant and fast food
- Salty snacks
- Condiments (soy sauce, BBQ sauce)

3. Potassium

Why it matters: Damaged kidneys may not remove potassium effectively. Too much potassium can affect your heart rhythm.

Important: Not everyone with CKD needs to limit potassium! Your blood work will determine if this applies to you. Do not avoid high potassium foods unless your healthcare team specifically instructed you to do so. Potassium can be beneficial for blood pressure control and reducing the blood's acid load which will support your kidneys.

If you need to limit potassium:

Lower-Potassium Choices:

- Apples, berries, grapes, pineapple, pears and plums
- Green beans, cabbage, cauliflower, asparagus, cucumbers, onions, peas and peppers

Higher-Potassium Foods to Limit:

- Bananas, oranges, melons, dried fruits and mangos
- Potatoes, sweet potatoes, spinach, beets and tomato sauce or soup. A slice of tomato on a sandwich is A OK! It will not give you too much Potassium.
- Low-sodium salt substitutes

4. Phosphorus

Why it matters: High phosphorus levels can pull calcium from your bones and cause deposits in your blood vessels.

Important: Like potassium, not everyone needs to restrict phosphorus initially. This becomes more important in later CKD stages. Wait to discuss this with your Renal Dietitian.

If you need to limit phosphorus:

Lower-Phosphorus Choices:

- Rice, almond or coconut milk (unenriched)
- Fresh fruits and vegetables

Higher-Phosphorus Foods to Limit:

- Dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese)
- Dark sodas, except root beer
- Processed foods with phosphate additives, ie: bacon, sausage, hot dogs
- Frozen meals with phosphate additives

5. Fluids

Why it matters: As kidney function declines, some people need to watch fluid intake to prevent swelling and strain on the heart.

General guidance:

- In early CKD, most people don't need to limit fluids
- Stay well-hydrated unless told otherwise
- Your doctor will advise if fluid restriction is needed

What You CAN Eat: Building Kidney-Friendly Meals

Breakfast Ideas:

- 1 Scrambled egg with peppers and onions, whole grain toast, apple slices
- Oatmeal with blueberries and a drizzle of honey
- French toast with strawberries
- Non-dairy yogurt with granola and berries

Lunch Ideas:

- 3 oz grilled chicken sandwich with lettuce, tomato and cucumber, side of grapes
- Pasta salad with olive oil and vegetables
- Chickpea salad sandwich with carrots and cucumbers
- Peanut butter and jelly sandwich with cut up vegetables and hummus
- Bagel with cream cheese with side salad

Dinner Ideas:

- 4 oz baked salmon with rice pilaf and green beans
- 4 oz stir-fried chicken with brown rice, bell peppers, onions and broccoli
- 4 oz turkey meatballs, sauteed broccoli and zucchini with pasta and pesto
- Black bean and veggie tacos

Snack Ideas:

- Apple slices with peanut butter (portion-controlled)
- Unsalted popcorn
- Fresh berries
- Rice cakes with cream cheese



Practical Tips for Right Now

1. Read Food Labels

- Check sodium content first
- Compare brands—sodium levels vary widely

2. Cook at Home

- Gives you control over ingredients
- Use fresh ingredients when possible
- Flavor with herbs, garlic, lemon, vinegar instead of salt

3. Don't Make Drastic Changes

- Avoid extreme diet changes before seeing your Dietitian
- Keep a food diary to share at your appointment
- Focus on reducing sodium as a safe first step for most people



Red Flags: When to Call Your Doctor

Contact your healthcare provider if you experience:

- Significant swelling in legs, ankles, or face
- Sudden weight gain (3+ pounds in a day or 5+ pounds in a week)
- Difficulty breathing or shortness of breath
- Decreased urination
- Muscle cramps or weakness (may indicate potassium issues)
- Irregular heartbeat



Preparing for Your Dietitian Appointment

To make the most of your appointment:

- ✓ Bring your lab results (eGFR, creatinine, potassium, CO2)
- ✓ Keep a 3-day food diary (include beverages)
- ✓ List all medications and supplements (some affect nutrition)
- ✓ Write down your questions about protein, potassium, phosphorus, supplements, and follow-up
- ✓ Share your lifestyle: work schedule, cooking abilities, food preferences, cultural considerations

? Common Questions

Can I eat out at restaurants?

Yes, but choose carefully. Pick grilled items, ask for no added salt, request sauces on the side, and watch portion sizes. Try to avoid fast food, as it is typically very high in sodium.

Do I need to become vegetarian?

No. While a plant based diet can be beneficial, people with CKD can continue to eat animal protein in moderation. Your Dietitian will guide you.

Are protein shakes okay?

Check with your Dietitian first. Your dietitian can recommend appropriate supplements if needed.

Can I drink alcohol?

Discuss this with your Physician.

What about vitamins?

Don't take supplements without consulting your healthcare team. Some vitamins can be harmful when kidneys aren't working well.

Can I eat whole grain bread or brown rice?

Yes, you can and should absolutely enjoy these foods. They are a good source of fiber and nutrients.

Does insurance cover nutrition appointments with a Renal Dietitian?

Yes, most insurance companies will pay for preventive nutrition services. Medicare specifically pays for Chronic Kidney Disease consultations with a Registered Dietitian.

Do I need to restrict my protein intake?

That will be determined by your Dietitian. Do not avoid protein until you meet with your RD.

Remember

- **CKD nutrition is not one-size-fits-all.** Your needs are unique to you.
- **Early-stage CKD has different needs than advanced CKD.** Your restrictions may be minimal right now.
- **Your renal dietitian is your partner.** They will personalize recommendations and adjust them as your needs change.
- **Small changes make a big difference.** You don't have to be perfect—every positive change helps.
- **You can still enjoy food.** A kidney-friendly diet can be delicious and satisfying with the right guidance.

Resources

National Kidney Foundation

kidney.org

Comprehensive kidney disease information and resources

Find a Renal Dietitian

NKF Dietitian Search

Locate a certified renal nutrition specialist near you

Suplena Supplement

Suplena by Abbott

Nutritional supplement for adding calories in CKD

American Association of Kidney Patients

aakp.org

Patient support and advocacy organization

Your Next Steps

- ✓ Schedule your appointment with a renal dietitian
- ✓ Start reading food labels, especially for sodium
- ✓ Keep a food diary
- ✓ Prepare questions for your dietitian
- ✓ Stay positive—you're taking control of your health

Ready to Get Started?

Email Jennifer at Jennifer@JMannNutrition.com

Or visit: JenniferMannNutrition.com

Jennifer Mann, MS, RD, CSR | Board Certified Renal Nutrition Specialist

© 2025 Jennifer Mann Nutrition. All rights reserved. | For personal use — please do not distribute without permission.

This guide is for educational purposes only and does not replace personalized medical nutrition therapy from a registered dietitian.