

Dialysis and Nutritional Care

The kidneys are the body's "filtering system." In a person with healthy kidneys, the nutrients from the foods he or she eats are absorbed by the body as needed and the excess is excreted in the urine and feces. When the kidneys are damaged as in chronic kidney disease (CKD) or end-stage renal disease (ESRD), the kidneys cannot filter out the excess nutrients that are taken into the body through food and drink. These extra nutrients can build up and become toxic to the body and make you feel sick; this is known as "uremia."

Dialysis performs the function of the kidneys by cleaning the blood. However, it is still necessary to limit what goes into your body. Too much potassium, for example, may not be completely removed during a dialysis session, and you may still have the side effects of the excess nutrient.

The nutrients that should be limited in ESRD include potassium, phosphorus, sodium (salt), and fluids. Too much of these could cause muscle spasms, cardiac arrest, bone damage, itching, swelling or fluid retention, bloating, and cramping during fluid removal at dialysis, among other things.

If you receive dialysis on a regular basis, you should be sure to consume adequate protein (usually about 1.2 to 1.3 grams per kilogram of ideal body weight) (1) as dialysis removes proteins from your blood.

In addition, many patients experience weight loss when beginning dialysis. It is important to consume enough calories each day to prevent drastic weight changes. Typically, it is recommended that dialysis patients consume 30 to 35 calories per kilogram of ideal body weight. (1) This will vary based on "dry weight" (weight after excess fluid has been removed) versus ideal weight if there is a significant difference.

Your dietitian can help you to know which foods should be avoided and which foods are okay to eat. A dietitian is a healthcare professional that specializes in food and nutrition. Dietitians are considered experts in nutrition and will hold the credential of "RD" signifying registered dietitian.

Other health conditions will also contribute to the diet prescribed to you by your dietitian. Having a condition such as diabetes or cancer, for example, will affect your nutritional needs differently and may require additional diet modification. Your dietitian can talk with you about what is best for you. The most important thing is to be aware of what changes you need to make and to work with your dietitian to develop a plan for making these changes.

Reference

Recommendations taken from the National Kidney Foundation's Kidney Disease Outcomes Quality Initiative (2000). Available at http://www.kidney.org/professionals/kdoqi/guidelines_updates/doqi_nut.html