



If you have recently had a kidney transplant, you are probably wondering if your diet will differ from the one you followed before your transplant. After a kidney transplant, your diet still plays a big role. If you were on dialysis and had a kidney transplant, you may find that diet is easier to follow than the one you were on during dialysis.

Kidney transplant medications

Your diet may be affected by medicines you need to prevent rejection of your new kidney. Some common anti-rejection medicines that may affect your diet include:

- Steroids (prednisone)
- Cyclosporine (Sandimmune, Neoral, Gengraf)
- Tacrolimus (Prograf)
- Azathioprine (Imuran)
- Mycophenolate (CellCept)
- Sirolimus (Rapamune)

Anti-rejection medicines may change the way your body works in different ways. Some anti-rejection medicines can cause increases in appetite, blood fats (like cholesterol and triglycerides), blood sugar levels, potassium, and blood pressure. Some may also lower magnesium and other minerals. Your medical team will monitor you to make sure you are getting the nutrients you need.

Weight gain

Many people have a better appetite after they have a transplant, which can lead to unwanted weight gain. It is important to eat the right portion sizes for weight management as well as blood sugar control. Limit high-calorie foods such as sweets, pastries, and other foods high in fat or sugar. You can help control your calories by eating:

- Foods high in fiber, such as vegetables and fruits
- Lean meat, skinned poultry, and fish
- Nonfat dairy products, such as skim milk
- Sugar-free drinks like water, unsweetened tea, coffee, or milk

Controlling your weight will lower your chance of having problems such as heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure. If you gain unwanted weight, you will need to exercise more and follow a lower calorie diet. Ask your doctor to refer you to a kidney dietitian to help you plan lower calorie meals and snacks.

Nutrients and minerals

KIDNEY TRANSPLANT AND SODIUM

Most people still need to limit salt after they have a transplant, although it is different with each person. Transplant medicines, especially steroids, may cause your body to hold on to fluid, and salt makes this problem worse.

Increased fluid in the body raises blood pressure. Controlling blood pressure is very important to your transplant. Your doctor will decide how much sodium is best for you. It is a good idea to limit foods high in salt, such as:

- Table salt
- Cured meats, such as ham, bacon, and sausage
- Lunch meats, such as bologna, salami, and hot dogs
- Pre-packaged frozen dinners
- Ramen noodles, boxed potatoes and packaged noodle and rice mixes
- Canned soups and pasta sauces
- Pickled foods, such as olives, pickles, and sauerkraut
- Snack foods, such as salted chips, nuts, pretzels, and popcorn

KIDNEY TRANSPLANT AND PROTEIN

Protein is important for the following reasons:

- It builds and repairs muscles and tissues
- It helps you heal after the transplant operation

Your protein intake may need to be higher than normal right after your transplant to help build up the muscle tissue that will be broken down by the large doses of steroids. Later, you can return to moderate amounts of protein. Examples of healthy proteins include:

- Meat, chicken and fish
- Milk, yogurt and cheese
- Eggs
- Peanut butter
- Beans and peas

KIDNEY TRANSPLANT AND POTASSIUM

As long as your new kidney is working well, you should be able to eat normal amounts of potassium. However, some transplant medicines can increase your potassium levels, while other medicines may decrease it. Foods high in potassium include:

- Oranges
- Potatoes
- Bananas
- Milk and yogurt
- Tomatoes and tomato products, such as pizza and spaghetti sauces

KIDNEY TRANSPLANT AND CALCIUM AND PHOSPHOROUS

You may need to pay close attention to your calcium and phosphorus levels. If you have been ill for some time, your body probably lacks the balance of calcium and phosphorus needed for healthy bones, especially if you previously had kidney disease. In the months after your transplant, your doctor will check for possible bone loss and talk to you about the best way to keep your bones as healthy as possible.

Most adults need about two servings of dairy (low fat milk, cheese and yogurt) each day. Your doctor may decide you need more calcium, phosphorus, or vitamin D than your diet provides and may tell you to take a supplement. You should not start any supplements on your own as this could cause problems with your transplant. Remember to review all herbs and supplements with your medical team.



Staying healthy after kidney transplant

After your kidney transplant, you will need to take special medicines, called immunosuppressants, anti-rejection medicines. While these medicines help lower the chances of your new kidney being rejected by your body. They can also weaken your body's ability to fight infection. Taking these medicines also increases your risk for getting sick from germs, such as bacterial infections, which can be due to the foods you eat.

Practice safe food handling by:

- Being careful when eating out.
- Avoiding certain 'high-risk' foods.

If you have questions or need more information about a healthy eating plan after your kidney transplant, ask your transplant team to refer you to a registered dietitian kidney nutritionist.

For more information, contact the National Kidney Foundation

Toll-free help line: **855.NKF.CARES** or email: **nkfcares@kidney.org**