

## PLANT-BASED DIETS: KIDNEY FAILURE AND KIDNEY TRANSPLANT

Many people think having kidney failure or a kidney transplant means you can't be a vegetarian, vegan, or follow a mainly plant-based diet. However, research studies have shown that people with chronic kidney disease can actually benefit from eating a well-balanced diet consisting of mostly plant-based foods. Plant-based diets may help to:



Lower blood cholesterol



Increase fiber intake to help manage blood sugar in people with diabetes



Achieve and maintain a healthy weight



Lower uric acid levels and prevent symptoms of gout

### About plant-based diets

Plant-based diets have become popular in recent years. Plant-based foods are rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals that help lower your risk for heart disease and other health problems. You may choose to eat a plant-based diet for health, religious, cultural, or ethical reasons.



#### Eat more of these:

- whole grains
- fruits
- vegetables
- legumes (beans, peas, lentils)
- unsalted nuts
- healthy oils (canola, olive)



#### Eat less animal proteins:

- dairy
- eggs
- fish
- meat
- poultry

To make plant-based diets as healthy as possible, you should avoid processed foods like:

- many types of canned foods and soups
- refined grains (white breads and pasta, highly processed or high sugar cereals, white rice)
- snack foods (potato chips, cookies)
- sugar sweetened beverages
- foods with high fructose corn syrup

Foods that have animal products like pizza, meat or cheese-based soups, and mayonnaise should also be reduced. You may eat canned or frozen fruit because it does not contain salt (sodium).

### Popular plant-based diets

#### DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension)

This diet is often recommended for people with high blood pressure. It consists of eating fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy foods, whole grains, fish, poultry, and nuts. It also limits sodium (salt), sweets, sugary drinks, red meats, and foods that are high in saturated fat, cholesterol, and trans fats. It recommends 4-5 servings /day of fruits, 4-5 servings/day of vegetables and moderate amounts of lean protein.

#### Mediterranean

A healthy diet that originated in Mediterranean countries, such as Italy and Spain, which consists mainly of cereals, grains, vegetables, beans, fruits, and nuts, along with moderate amounts of fish, cheese, olive oil, yogurt, and little red meat. This diet recommends 2 to 3 servings/day of fruits and 4 to 5 servings of vegetables/day. It differs from the DASH diet because it allows for more healthy fats like olive oil and certain types of nuts.

#### MIND

A hybrid that combines aspects of both Mediterranean and DASH to create a diet that focuses on brain health. Green leafy vegetables, berries, nuts, olive oil, whole grains, fish, beans, and poultry are the main nutrients.

## Plant-based diets and your health

If you have kidney failure or a kidney transplant, you may benefit from a plant-based diet. Studies have shown plant-based diets can:

### HELP YOU KEEP A HEALTHY WEIGHT

Plant-based foods usually have fewer calories than animal-based foods. They also provide volume and take time to chew to allow your brain to register that you feel full. Half of your plate should be fruits and vegetables.

### LOWER BLOOD PRESSURE AND CHOLESTEROL

Over 50% of people with kidney disease develop heart disease due to high blood pressure. Over time, high blood pressure can lead to heart disease. Plant-based diets also help your heart in other ways such as lowering bad cholesterol and helping control your weight.

### LOWER YOUR RISK FOR DIABETES

Healthy, plant-based foods can help your body use insulin better. Insulin is a hormone that controls how much sugar is in your blood. Having too much sugar in your blood can lead to diabetes. In people with diabetes, plant-based diets can help keep blood sugar in check.

### IMPROVE ANTIOXIDANT LEVELS

Antioxidants are compounds found in foods that help protect your cells from damage and they are abundant in plant-based foods, such as fruits and vegetables. Vitamin C and E are examples of antioxidants.

## Benefits of plant-based diets in people with kidney failure

Plant-based diets can be a healthy choice for people with stage 5 CKD, also called end-stage kidney disease (ESKD) or kidney failure—but you need to be sure your diet is nutritious and well-balanced. With careful meal planning, you can still get the right nutrients in safe amounts.

Did you know that phosphorus in plants is absorbed at a lower rate than phosphorus in animal-based and processed foods?

## Benefits of plant-based diets in people with a kidney transplant

A plant-based diet is encouraged after kidney transplant to help manage weight and lower cholesterol and decrease the risk of heart disease.



### Keep in mind

There is no one diet that is right for everyone with kidney disease. What you can and cannot eat will continue to change over time, depending on whether you have other health problems like diabetes or heart disease. That's why it's so important to talk to your healthcare team and a kidney dietitian.

## Get in touch with a kidney dietitian

Talk to a kidney dietitian if you are interested in trying a plant-based diet. To find a kidney dietitian in your area, visit [bit.ly/nkfckdrd](https://bit.ly/nkfckdrd).

**MEATLESS MONDAY**

Want an easy way to start eating less meat?

Go **Meatless Monday** every week and get regular tips and recipes by following **#MeatlessMonday** and learning more at [MeatlessMonday.com](https://MeatlessMonday.com).

The National Kidney Foundation wishes to thank its Council on Renal Nutrition (CRN) for the development of this fact sheet.

**For more information, contact the National Kidney Foundation**

Toll-free help line: **855.NKF.CARES** or email: [nkfcares@kidney.org](mailto:nkfcares@kidney.org)