



Eating guidelines for diabetes and chronic kidney disease

Introduction

If you have both diabetes and chronic kidney disease (CKD), it may seem that the diabetes and kidney diets don't fit well together. However, with careful planning, you can follow your kidney diet and still control your blood sugar.

Controlling your blood sugar is an important first step to slowing down the progression of kidney disease. It will also help prevent or minimize other complications of diabetes such as eye problems or nerve problems and help control your thirst.

Controlling or preventing high blood pressure is another critical part of your care. Avoid salt and high salt foods, and take your blood pressure medication as ordered to keep your blood pressure in check.

Having diabetes and CKD puts you at a higher risk for heart disease. Choose heart-healthy fats, include regular activity and control your weight to lower your risk for heart attack.

Finally, eating a moderate amount of protein is another change you can make to reduce the workload of your kidneys. If you are on dialysis, however, you will need to eat *extra* protein since dialysis increases protein losses.

Keys to success for controlling your blood sugar

1. Eat three meals a day, no more than six hours apart.
2. Try to eat at regular times (even on days when you have dialysis). If you can't eat a meal, make sure you have a snack that contains carbohydrates in place of your meal.
3. Eat the same amount of carbohydrate-containing foods at each meal. Carbohydrate-containing foods break down to sugar when eaten and include grains or starches, fruits, milk products and some vegetables.
4. Avoid simple sugars and sweets such as sugar, regular pop (soda, soft drinks), fruit juices, sweet desserts, candies, jam, and honey. Try using sugar substitutes in your recipes.
5. Do some physical activity each day. Try walking for 5-15 minutes after each meal.
6. Use your glucose meter as directed by your doctor or diabetes team to monitor how your diet and medications affect your blood glucose level throughout the day.
7. Maintain your blood sugar in the range recommended by your doctor and/or diabetes team.

- With CKD, you are at increased risk of low blood sugar. The doctor who takes care of your diabetes may need to decrease your insulin (or other diabetes medication). You should report repeated low blood sugar reactions to your doctor.
- If you are on dialysis, controlling your blood sugar can help to decrease thirst and control fluid intake.
- If you are on peritoneal dialysis, you may need higher doses of insulin (or other diabetes medication). Your doctor and/or diabetes team will help you adjust these medications.
- With a kidney transplant and anti-rejection medications, you may need higher doses of insulin (or other diabetes medication). Your doctor and/or diabetes team will help you adjust these medications.

Putting it all together

If you have both diabetes and kidney disease, you can still eat well if you remember to:

1. Eat about the same amount of carbohydrates around the same time each day.
2. Limit your milk and dairy intake.
3. Control blood sugar to help control thirst and fluid gains (if you are on dialysis).
4. Avoid cooking with salt, salt substitutes, or adding salt at the table.
5. Choose lean protein foods prepared with little or no added fat.
6. Choose low phosphorus and low potassium foods if directed by your doctor or dietitian.

If in doubt about what to eat or drink, request a meeting with your dietitian to design a diet plan for all your health conditions combined.

Frequently asked questions

Q—My diabetes diet says to choose whole grains more often, but my kidney diet tells me to eat white bread—which one should I follow?

A—Choose white bread in the amounts recommended in your diabetes diet or ask your dietitian if some whole grain products can be included in your diet. Whole grains are higher in potassium and phosphorus. Research shows that it is the total amount of carbohydrates that matters most in controlling blood glucose.

Q—I was taught to treat low blood sugar with orange juice, but now I'm not allowed to drink that anymore. What should I do if my sugar gets too low?

A—Any type of juice is effective in treating a low blood sugar. Cranberry or apple juice will work exactly the same way orange juice does. Orange juice has more potassium than other juices and is not recommended if you tend to have higher blood potassium levels. If you are on a fluid restriction, the best way to treat a low blood sugar is with candies or glucose tablets so you don't add any extra fluids.

Q—How do I treat an episode of low blood sugar?

A—If you find yourself sweating, shaking or feeling particularly hungry, your blood sugar may be too low. If you have any of these symptoms, check your blood sugar right away. If it's low (<4 mmol/L), eat 15 g of fast-acting carbohydrate, such as glucose tablets, 1 tbsp honey or ¾ cup apple juice, right away. Wait ten to fifteen minutes and check your sugar again. If it's still low, treat again. If your next meal is more than an hour away, or you are going to be physically active, eat a snack with a carbohydrate and a protein source. Good examples are toast and peanut butter, or half a sandwich.

Q—I have such a different diet than the rest of my family—how can I expect them to eat like this?

A—Actually, many of the dietary changes you need to make are also healthy changes for your family. Things like avoiding salt and simple sugars, and choosing smaller portions of meat and protein (unless you are on dialysis), are all healthy choices that can benefit everyone.

Q—Should I continue to choose more legumes as directed by my diabetes diet?

A – Legumes are high in phosphorus and potassium and should be avoided unless your dietitian tells you how to safely include them in your diet. If you are vegetarian, you should see a Registered Dietitian as soon as possible to make sure you are meeting all of your nutritional needs.

Q—I have several other medical conditions and I don't know how to make everything fit together—what can I do?

A—Ask your doctor for a referral to a Registered Dietitian. The dietitian will work with you to create an individualized eating plan that takes all your medical conditions into account.

For information and tools to help you manage your kidney-friendly diet, visit www.kidneycommunitykitchen.ca

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