



Nutrition Following a Kidney Transplant

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a dietetic practice group of the
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Introduction

After a kidney transplant, diet is very important for your healing and better general health.

You may have been on a strict diet before your kidney transplant. Your diet after the transplant will likely be easier. You will be able to eat many foods that were limited before.

Following your transplant, your health care team will help you with regular care and help you modify your diet. The following information reviews your long-term nutrition needs after you recover from surgery.

Goal 1: Reach a Healthy Weight

Following your transplant, you may notice an improved appetite. It is important not to overeat to prevent unwanted weight gain and other health issues.

With your kidney transplant, you will want to eat small, lean portions of **protein-rich foods** or use plant proteins instead.

Animal protein: beef, cheese, eggs, fish, pork, poultry, veal

Plant protein: beans, peas, nuts & seeds, nut butters, tofu



Include fresh and minimally processed foods that will help you meet your healthy weight goal. These include whole grains, lean meats, low-fat dairy products, fruits, and vegetables.



Exercise is also key in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. Get started with an exercise program as soon as your doctor allows. To control your weight and for good health, your goal should be 30 minutes per day of moderate exercise. Good examples of exercise include brisk walking, bike riding, and swimming.

Goal 2: Control Blood Sugar Levels

If you have a history of diabetes, controlling your blood sugars will help with the healing process. Even if you do not have a history of diabetes, you are at higher risk after the transplant.

Limit foods with added sugar such as sweets, desserts, and sugar-sweetened beverages. Instead choose whole grains and lower calorie, lower fat foods. For example, choose fresh fruit for dessert.



Maintain a healthy weight and exercise regularly to reduce your risk of diabetes.

Goal 3: Healthy Blood Lipid Levels

Lipids (fats) in your diet should be controlled after your transplant. This will help lower your risk of heart disease.

Keep your intake of fat to 30% of calories consumed.

Here are some diet suggestions for lowering fat and cholesterol:

- Limit alcohol use.
- Reduce the amount of fat or oil you use.
- Use healthier oils like canola or olive oil.
- Select lean meats, poultry, and fish or beans, peas, nuts, or seeds.
- Choose low-fat dairy products and salad dressings.
- Cook using low-fat methods like baking, broiling, or steaming.
- Substitute high-fat sweets with fruit or a low-fat dessert.

Goal 4: Control Blood Pressure

After the transplant, you may still need to limit sodium (salt) in your diet. This is important for healthy blood pressure and to prevent swelling.

Choose more fresh foods and minimally processed foods, made "from scratch", or "homemade" foods instead of pre-made or boxed foods. Look for canned foods with "no added salt" or "no added sugar".

Instead of limiting your fluid intake, your healthcare team may ask you to drink more fluids following your kidney transplant.



Goal 5: Bone Health

Kidney disease and a kidney transplant can cause bone loss. After surgery it is important to get enough calcium, vitamin D, and magnesium to promote bone growth. You will need:

Calcium, about 1500 mg/day

Sources: Low-fat milk, cheese, yogurt, leafy vegetables



Vitamin D, 400 IU/day

Sources: Fatty fish (such as salmon), egg yolks, fortified milk, other fortified foods and supplements



Magnesium, 300-400 mg/day

Sources: Green leafy vegetables, beans, nuts, and whole grains



Supplements may be needed if your blood levels are low or if you are not able to get enough of these nutrients through your diet.

Final Suggestions

- Avoid herbal supplements due to the risk of affecting your transplant medicines.
- Avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice since these affect many transplant medicines.
- Follow food safety guidelines such as avoiding undercooked meats, poultry, eggs, raw fish such as sushi or sashimi, and raw milk and unpasteurized dairy products.
- Choose healthy, fresh foods when possible.
- Do regular physical activity.

If you have any questions concerning a healthy diet after your kidney transplant, contact a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist.