

Kidney disease - Advice for a small appetite

Renal Dietetics

Last reviewed: May 2026

Next review: May 2029

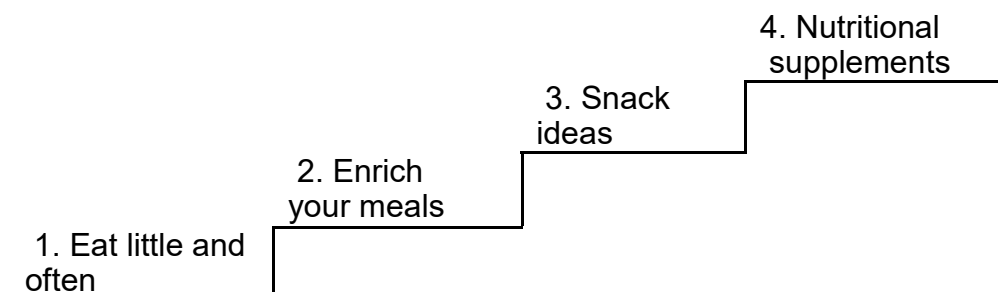
Information for Patients

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What can I do if I am eating less?

Having a small appetite can make eating feel difficult. Some days you might not feel hungry at all and skip meals. Even so, your body still needs energy and nutrients to stay healthy. There are simple things you can do to help yourself get enough food.

It is okay to relax healthy eating rules when your appetite is low. Pick foods you enjoy, even if they have more fat or sugar. Eating something is better than eating nothing.



These steps are important to:

- prevent weight loss
- reduce tiredness
- prevent muscle weakness and falls
- improve your ability to fight infections
- stay active

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

Step 1: Eat little and often

- Eat 3 small meals and 2 to 3 snacks every day.
- Include protein-rich foods like meat, fish, eggs, beans, lentils, tofu, and Quorn.
- Avoid drinking before meals.
- Have more milky puddings such as custard and rice pudding/ kheer.
- If you find large amounts of food too much to eat at once, try having smaller portions by using a smaller plate instead.
- Keep a food diary. This is a good way to see how you are doing. It can help spot where there is a gap to add a meal or snack.
- If your appetite changes through the day, eat when you can. For example if your appetite is better in the mornings have a cooked breakfast.
- If you are feeling too unwell, tired or are unable to cook, you could try:
 - having quick pre-prepared foods (convenience foods) like frozen meals, tinned foods and ready meals.
 - using a meal delivery service like Wiltshire Farm Foods or Oakhouse Foods, or other meal services such as 'Meals on Wheels' that are local to you.
- If you are feeling sick (nauseous), avoid strong cooking smells if possible. Try eating cold foods which may be easier to eat.
- When you are away from home, carry snacks to have on the go such as a boiled egg, biscuits or samosa.
- Create an environment which helps you to eat. You may find it easier to eat while in a quiet relaxed atmosphere, while talking to someone, reading, listening to the radio or watching TV.

Step 2: Enrich your meals

This is a great way of adding energy (calories) to your meals without increasing the portion size.

<p>To breakfast cereals or porridge add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cream • syrup • honey • sugar • full fat Greek yoghurt 	<p>To potato and vegetables add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • butter or margarine • mayonnaise / salad cream • oil based dressings to salads • cream / creamy sauces • Grated cheese
<p>To bread (sliced bread, chapatti, roti) add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • butter or margarine or ghee • jam / marmalade • honey / syrup • full fat cream cheese 	<p>To desserts add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cream: single, double, clotted • crème fraiche • jam • honey / syrup / sugar • ice-cream

Choose full fat foods wherever possible. For example, full fat milk and full fat yoghurts. These may be labelled 'luxury' or 'thick and creamy'. Avoid foods labelled 'light', 'diet' or 'low fat'.

Step 3: Snack ideas

These foods will give you extra energy (calories) and protein, even if eaten in small amounts at a time. For example, keep a plate of small cut sandwiches in the fridge to eat throughout the day or cut up a piece of cake and have with your hot drinks. Circle your favourite foods in the table to remind yourself of foods to choose when your appetite is low:

Sweet foods	Savoury foods
Plain sponge cake with custard or cream	Sandwiches made with ham, chicken, turkey, tinned tuna or egg
Tinned fruit and cream	Toast with tinned spaghetti, cream cheese
Ice-cream	Egg: fried, scrambled, poached, boiled, omelette
Crème caramel	Rice cakes, corn based crisps, breadsticks with cream cheese
Mousse	Crackers with butter and cream cheese
Trifle	Plain biscuits
Flapjack	Plain cakes
Croissant/ sweet pastry	Pitta/ roti/ naan/ bagel
Toasted crumpet/ scone/ hot cross bun (add butter, jam, honey or cream)	Meat/ vegetable samosa
Cheesecake	Plain dosa
Egg custard tart	Meat/ fish patties
Jam tart	Pies/ pastries/ quiche
Fruit pie	Sausage rolls
Doughnuts	Spring rolls
Cream cake	

Step 4: Nutritional supplements

There are a range of nutritional supplements available which may help to increase your calorie and protein intake. If you are on a fluid restriction, nutritional supplement drinks will need to be included in your allowance. Try to have these as a supplement in between meals rather than to replace a meal.

Please ask to speak to the dietitian if you would like to talk about supplements.

Frequently asked questions

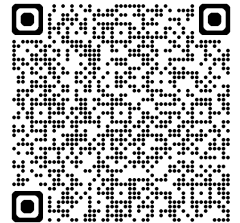
What if I have diabetes?

If you have diabetes, it is better to add protein or healthy fats to your meals instead of eating sugary foods or having another serving of carbohydrate foods or drinks. This can help stop your blood sugar from rising too much. If you check your blood sugar and see that it is higher than your usual target after making these dietary changes, talk to your GP or Diabetes Team so they can help you manage it.

For more support, you may find the guidance on the Diabetes UK website helpful, particularly their advice for managing diabetes during illness.

Can my mood affect my eating?

There are many factors that can affect your appetite. If your appetite is related to low mood, please talk about this with your GP. You may also find the following website helpful: www.kidneycareuk.org/get-support/counselling-and-support-service/. Please scan the QR code on the right for information on chronic kidney disease and mental health.



What if I follow a low potassium or phosphate diet?

When your appetite is low, you may not need to stick to your usual limits on potassium or phosphate.

Yogurt, milk, and cheese can give you energy and protein. This helps when you do not feel like eating much. But they also contain potassium and phosphate. If your levels are high, you might need to have smaller amounts. Your dietitian can help you decide what is right for you.

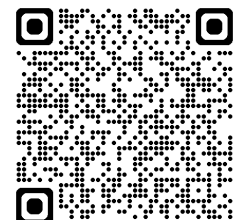
Do I need to have a healthy balanced diet?

If your appetite is low and you are not eating well, then do not worry about 'healthy eating rules' temporarily. The priority during this time is on eating to prevent weight loss and weakness. When your appetite improves and you are no longer losing weight, it is advised to follow a varied and balanced diet, as best able, by:

- having starchy energy-rich foods at each meal.
- eating a good variety of fruit and vegetables. It is recommended that all patients with kidney problems avoid star fruit as it may be harmful.
- including protein-rich foods in your meals 2 times a day.

Not sure what to eat today?

If you are stuck for recipe ideas, you can visit the Kidney Kitchen section on the Kidney Care UK website for some fresh meal ideas: www.kidneycareuk.org/about-kidney-health/living-kidney-disease/kidney-kitchen/. Please scan the QR code on the right for Kidney Kitchen recipes.



What can I do if I have constipation?

If you are struggling with constipation, this can make it harder to eat enough to maintain your weight and wellbeing. Talking with your GP or another healthcare professional can help, as they can suggest treatments or changes to your diet.

What can I do if I have taste changes?

Taste changes are common in people with chronic kidney disease (CKD). The main cause of taste changes in CKD is likely to be a build-up of toxins such as urea in the blood. Taste changes are sometimes described as a loss of taste, having a bitter or unpleasant taste such as “like metal”. This can have a big effect on appetite and enjoyment of food. Below are some tips to help manage them.

Dry mouth:

- Try not to eat salty foods as this increases your thirst.
- Stimulate saliva by sucking on chilled or frozen fruit slices (lemon, mandarin, apple, grapes).
- Keep your mouth clean with regular brushing. Use of antibacterial mouthwashes and toothpaste can help with a dry mouth.

Loss of taste:

- Enhance taste by adding herbs and spices such as chilli and pepper.
- Enhance taste by adding lemon, lime or vinegar, or having carbonated drinks.
- Marinate meats, chicken or fish before cooking with herbs, spices or lemon juice.
- Try to activate your sweet taste sensors by cooking main meals with added honey.

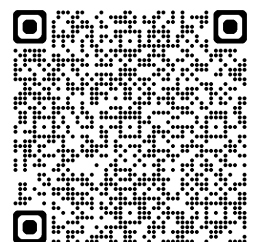
Bitter taste:

- Avoid having items with bitter tastes, for example coffee, chocolate, beer and tonic water.
- Try adding sweet tastes to counteract bitter tastes like adding sugar or honey
- Try having acidic foods/ drinks with your meal/ snack (like lemon or carbonated drink)
- Note: bitter taste can cause nausea and vomiting, and can also be improved by following the tips above.

Metallic taste:

- Use plastic cutlery if you notice a metallic taste in your mouth.
- Try peppermint/ menthol chewing gum.
- Try a glass of ginger beer or carbonated water with meals.

Please scan the QR code on the right for more information on loss of taste and kidney disease.





What if I do not feel like eating meat?

Many people with kidney disease describe a loss of interest in meat. This may be caused by a loss of taste to savoury foods and may include other protein rich foods too. If you are experiencing this you may not be getting enough protein in your diet. You may find it helpful to marinate your meat with herbs, spices or lemon juice, or try other sources of high protein foods listed in step 1.

Your personal plan

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Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns about your diet, please contact your renal dietitian (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm). If you are calling outside of these times, please leave a message and we will call you back.

Contact number for Leicester Renal dietitians: **0116 258 8002**

If you are under the care of a Renal dietitian outside of Leicester, please contact your local service.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અસ્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net