

Kidney disease: dietary advice when you first start haemodialysis

Dietetics

Information for Patients

Produced: February 2023

Review: February 2026

Leaflet number: 1379 Version: 1

Introduction

Starting dialysis is a time of change that can affect your usual day-to-day routine. Some people feel unwell at the time they start dialysis while others do not feel any different to normal.

How you are feeling may affect your appetite and how you are eating. Dietitians are available to help you during this time of change and will make contact with you during the first month of starting dialysis, however, **if you would like to speak with a dietitian sooner, then you are welcome to get in touch earlier (details below)**. Dietitians are part of the team of people who will support you with your dialysis treatment along with the doctors and nurses. Changes to your diet may be recommended as part of your dialysis treatment and your dietitian is available to support you with these.

Everyone's information needs are different. These needs will depend on your current health, any other health conditions you may have and how ready you are to take on information. We will work with you as an individual to help you meet your own goals and keep as well as you can. Some people will have met dietitians before and others will not so now is a good time to start afresh for everyone.

This leaflet will give you some starting information about food and drink now that you are having dialysis treatment. We can discuss it further when we make contact with you.

Contact details for the dietitian:

Name:

Telephone number:

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

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

Starting dialysis

- **Appetite**

If your appetite has been poor or your food has tasted different to normal, this should improve. Most people find that this gets better over the first few weeks of dialysis treatment. This is because the build-up of waste products in your blood, as a result of your kidneys not working properly, are now being cleaned from your body every time you have the treatment.

- **Balance of fluid in your body**

Some people start dialysis treatment with lots of excess fluid in their body. Too much fluid in the body is called fluid overload. This may cause swollen ankles/legs or it can make people feel a bit breathless. Fluid overload is not good for your heart as it will have to work much harder to deal with the extra fluid.

Others will have no sign of fluid overload. The nurses will ask you about these symptoms to guide your treatment plan.

Whether you have fluid overload or not usually depends on how much pee (urine) your kidneys are making and how much fluid you are taking into your body. It is normal for the amount of urine you make to go down over time after dialysis is started. For some this happens quite quickly but for others it may happen slowly over months and years. **Fluid overload happens when the amount of fluid you are taking into your body is more than what you make as urine.** Dialysis helps by removing fluid during your treatment.

Your weight is a useful measure to monitor fluid in your body. It is usual to weigh before and after your dialysis treatment to show changes in the amount of fluid in your body. Your weight as you arrive at dialysis tells you how much fluid has built up since your last treatment. This will guide the nurses on how much fluid to remove on dialysis. Your weight afterwards tells you if your treatment has been successful at removing the fluid.

It is better for you to avoid having too much fluid taken off on dialysis as it may make your treatment less comfortable. Less than 2kg (2000ml) is the preferred amount to remove on dialysis although if you are a small person, even less than this would be better. If you are regularly needing more than 2kg removed, this will be putting strain on your heart and shows that you are building up too much fluid. All of your care team can help support you to avoid fluid overload.

- **Avoiding fluid overload**

As you cannot change how much urine you make, the only way you can try to avoid fluid overload is by noticing how much fluid you are taking into your body.

Fluid intake is made up of all drinks, liquid you use to take tablets, milk in cereal, and foods that are 'wet' such as gravy, sauces, yoghurt, milk puddings, jelly and ice lollies.

Start to notice how many drinks you have, how much fluid you use to take your tablets, how wet your food and meals are. If you are building up too much fluid then you will need to reduce the amount of fluid you are taking into your body.

Some people find it useful to measure the amount of urine they are passing from time to time so they can monitor it as it changes. The staff can provide you with a container to do this if you would like.

Others find it is useful to record the amount of fluid they are taking into their body. Measure the cups, glasses and mugs that you use most often to allow you to do this more easily. For puddings and yoghurts, estimate the fluid volume as half of the actual weight / volume.

For example, 200ml (approx. 1/3 pint) of custard is equal to about 100ml of fluid.

The fluid in fruit and vegetables does not need to be included as part of your fluid allowance. You do not need to count the fluid in rehydrated foods such as rice or pasta. If you are taking any supplement drinks (for example, Fortisip, Ensure), these should be counted in your fluid intake.

Reducing your fluid intake to avoid fluid overload can be very difficult for some people. This may be because they feel thirsty all the time or due to habit where they have been used to drinking a lot.

Helping with thirst

Use a smaller cup

Sip drinks more slowly and spread out your fluid allowance over the day

Stay cool, avoid overheating and excess thirst

Use an ice-cube in place of a drink

Limit your intake of salt and salty/very spicy foods. This will help to reduce your thirst

You can stimulate saliva and stop your mouth feeling dry by sucking a slice of lemon or lime, sugar free mints or boiled sweets and chewing sugar free gum

- **Salt**

Too much salt is not healthy for anyone but is even more important for those having dialysis treatment as it can affect your blood pressure and make you thirsty. This will not be helpful if you are trying to reduce your fluid intake.

Use less salt at mealtimes and in cooking – use more herbs and spices such as garlic to flavour food.

Avoid high salt foods such as processed foods. Colour coding on food labels will tell you if something is high in salt and will be red. Use more fresh and frozen unprocessed foods such as fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, poultry, eggs and pulses.

- **Other diet restrictions**

If you have been advised about your diet before starting dialysis treatment, continue to follow the information you have been given until you make contact with the dietitian again. They will be able

to see the notes made by the previous dietitian and advise if any changes are necessary. This is a chance to start again and make sure you are clear on what is best now that you have started dialysis.

Useful information

Patients Knows Best www.patientsknowbest.com

You are able to see your medical records and blood results by registering with a national website called Patients Know Best

You will need to go onto the website and use the 'Register' button. This website should link into the NHS app on your phone.

Kidney Care UK: www.kidneycareuk.org

This website has lots of information for people with kidney disease. There is also a link to Kidney Kitchen for kidney-friendly recipes

Summary

- The dietitian will contact you during the first few weeks of starting dialysis to support you with your diet needs. Please call sooner if there are questions that you would like answers to before then.
- If your appetite has been poor, this should start to improve over the next few weeks
- Start to be aware of your weight and watch changes in your weight from one dialysis treatment to the next. This will allow you to start learning about **fluid balance**.
- Start to notice your fluid intake. You may not need to make any changes at first but over time this is likely to be something you will need to manage.
- Think about how you use salt and salty foods. Start thinking about ways to reduce the amount of salt you eat.

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 અન્ય 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 equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk