

Taking care of your kidneys

By Céline Quintin, P.Dt.*

(586 words)

Our kidneys are essential to life. These two small organs work tirelessly to filter 180 litres of our blood per day and to remove waste from our bodies.

Kidney disease is the progressive loss of kidney function, ultimately leading to kidney failure. Unfortunately, the number of people with kidney disease is increasing in Canada and around the world.

Act now

It is very important to manage kidney disease with the help of a team of specialists, including a physician, dietitian, nurse and pharmacist. This team of people can tell you what things you can do to slow or stabilize the progression of kidney disease.

These measures include:

- blood pressure control
- blood sugar control (for diabetics)
- smoking cessation
- avoiding excess protein and salt
- achieving or maintaining a healthy weight
- taking precautions with products harmful to the kidneys, like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs),¹ contrast agents which are used for certain medical examinations, and some natural products that are sold over the counter

It is important to tell your healthcare provider about all products you are taking, especially “natural” products which are sold without a prescription.

In summary, many measures to slow the progression of kidney disease do include medications, but there are also many things you can do yourself to keep your kidneys working as long as possible.

Nutrition

What you eat plays a major role in the treatment of kidney disease. The main goals of the kidney diet (also referred to as a renal diet) are to meet your nutritional needs, reduce the accumulation of waste and slow the progression of kidney disease.

Watch for protein, salt and minerals

Controlling the amount of protein and salt (sodium) in your diet is an important first step. In some cases, the amount of minerals like potassium and phosphorus you consume may also need to be reduced. Label reading is very important and you may want to avoid phosphate additives in processed foods to protect your kidneys.

¹https://www.kidney.org/atoz/content/painmeds_analgesics

Making food from scratch using recipes like the ones in *Spice it up! Giving zest to you renal diet* (www.myspiceitup.ca) is a great way to avoid excess protein, sodium and additive.

An experienced dietitian should supervise any change to your diet, because maintaining good nutritional status is very important.

Control hypertension

High blood pressure and diabetes are the most common causes of kidney failure. Uncontrolled hypertension can speed up the progression of kidney disease. If you are taking a blood pressure medication, it is important to take it as prescribed by your doctor. As well, a low-salt diet can help control blood pressure.

It's not enough to simply reduce the salt you are adding to your food with a saltshaker; you also need to limit hidden salt in processed foods and restaurant meals. Your daily sodium intake should not be higher than 2300 mg. Label reading will help you to choose low sodium foods.

Control diabetes

High sugar levels from uncontrolled diabetes damage blood vessels and cause loss of kidney function. Good blood sugar control helps protect your kidneys. Following your diabetic diet, taking your medication, monitoring your blood sugar levels and staying active will help to control your blood sugar.

The need for personalized care

In this article we discussed the most important measures that will help slow the progression of kidney disease. However, kidney disease is very complex... and each of us is different. So to ensure the best possible care, it is important that everyone with kidney disease is evaluated individually.

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