

Dining Out with Confidence

A Guide for People with Kidney Disease









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Stages of chronic kidney disease

There are 5 stages of chronic kidney disease (CKD) as shown in the table below. Your healthcare provider will tell you the stage of kidney disease, based on how well your kidneys are working and your estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR). The eGFR number comes from a lab test that measures the amount of blood your kidneys are filtering each minute. As CKD gets worse, the eGFR number goes down.

STAGES OF KIDNEY DISEASE

STAGE	DESCRIPTION	ESTIMATED GLOMERULAR FILTRATION RATE (eGFR)	KIDNEY FUNCTION
1	Kidney damage (e.g., protein in the urine) with normal kidney function	90 or above	 90-100%
2	Kidney damage with mild loss of kidney function	60 to 89	 60-89%
3a	Mild to moderate loss of kidney function	45 to 59	 45-59%
3b	Moderate to severe loss of kidney function	30 to 44	 30-44%
4	Severe loss of kidney function	15 to 29	 15-29%
5	Kidney failure	Less than 15	 Less than 15%

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Introduction

Most people enjoy eating out. This guide gives ideas for making your dining experience fun. Start by asking your kidney dietitian for any tips or advice. If you have sodium, potassium, phosphorus, protein, or fluid restrictions, this booklet will help you make good decisions. Your specific dietary needs will depend on your level of kidney function and other health conditions.

PLAN AHEAD

If you will be eating out for dinner, plan breakfast and lunch at home accordingly. Cut back on serving sizes and foods high in sodium and potassium during the day. Moderation is key. Call ahead to learn more

about the menu and how the food is prepared. Many restaurants now have websites where they list their menus. Many apps also provide nutrition information.

Choose a restaurant where it will be easiest to select foods best suited for you. Restaurants where food is made to order are the best choice. Restaurant staff are used to special food requests or methods of preparation. However, some may require that you call at least 24 hours in advance to make arrangements.

MAKING YOUR SELECTIONS

Look over the menu carefully. Ask your server for more details about anything you do not understand. Practice making requests about the way your food is prepared or served. Consider sharing a main dish with a friend or family member.

EXAMPLES OF SPECIAL REQUESTS

For salad dressings, gravies or sauces: "...on the side."
For any grilled, sautéed or baked entrées: "No salt, please."
For Asian foods: "...with no MSG (monosodium glutamate)."
For sandwiches or burgers: "...without cheese" or "catsup on the side."

PROTEIN CONCERNS

Your protein needs will depend on your stage of kidney disease. If your kidney diet includes a protein restriction, you may want to request half portions of main dishes that contain meat, poultry, fish, or cheese. You could share a main dish with a dining companion. Another option is to take part of your main dish home in a takeout box.



Tips

- Lunch protein portion is usually 4 to 6 ounces
- Dinner protein portion is usually 6 to 8 ounces
- Plant-based sources of protein are a healthy choice

Don't forget that protein is found in cheese and cream sauces; food prepared with milk, nuts, and eggs; and in plant-based dishes containing dried beans or lentils.



Guidelines for Specific Meals or Courses

Breakfast:

Breakfast may be one of the easiest meals for following your meal plan when you dine out. Most restaurants offer à la carte breakfast items.

BREAKFAST	
Better Choices	Poor Choices
Eggs, cooked to order	Cured or salted meats or fish, such as ham, sausage, lox and Canadian bacon. Limit bacon to 2 strips occasionally.
Omelettes with low-potassium vegetables, such as mushroom or squash	Omelets with cheese or above meats, fast-food breakfast sandwiches, breakfast burritos
Toast, bagels, English muffins, croissants, plain or blueberry muffins	Biscuits and bran muffins
French toast	Home fries or hash brown potatoes
Margarine, jelly, honey, cinnamon, sugar, and imitation pancake syrup	Real maple syrup or gravy
Fruits and juices (1/2 cup), such as applesauce, apple juice, berries, and pineapple	Fruits and juices, such as orange juice or a grapefruit half
Hot and cold cereals	Bran cereals and granola with nuts, seeds, or wheat germ
Donuts, fruit pastry, sweet rolls, coffee cake	Pastries containing chocolate, nuts, coconut, or caramel



Tip

If you have a fluid restriction save your fluid throughout the day to allow more when you eat out.



Beverages:

- Choose beverages low in potassium and phosphorus. (Ask your kidney dietitian for specific guidelines.)
- If you need to restrict fluids:
 - » Plan the amount of fluid you may have during the meal.
 - » Plan when you want the beverage: before, during, or after the meal. Decline offers at other times.
 - » Request that your glass or cup not be refilled. Order beverages by the glass instead of ordering a pitcher of drinks.
 - » Squeeze lemon wedges into your water to help quench your thirst.
 - » Turn cups or glasses upside down before they are filled or ask to have them removed.
 - » Push your glass or cup away from your plate when you are finished to avoid refills.

BEVERAGES	
Better Choices	Poor Choices*
Non-cola soft drinks, such as Sprite®, 7UP®, or orange soda	Any cola
Iced tea or coffee	Cocoa, milk, milk shakes, cocoa mixes
Lemonade, limeade, water	Orange juice-type drinks, tomato juice, vegetable juice
Cocktails mixed with club soda, ginger ale, tonic water, or soft drinks (except colas)	Cocktails mixed with fruit juice, tomato juice, vegetable cocktail, milk, cream, or ice cream
Wine, red or white	Beer

**Avoid beverages with phosphate additives.*

Salads and Salad Bars:

- Salads are often part of the appetizer list. Use your allowed fruits and vegetables for these choices.
- Request that the dressing be served on the side so you can control the amount you eat. Oil and vinegar is always a good choice for dressing. You may bring your own low-sodium dressing. Lemon or lime juice squeezed generously over the salad can replace salad dressing altogether.
- If they are not listed on the menu, ask the server which vegetables or fruits are in the salad. Often salads are prepared individually, so you can usually make special requests. Some examples are listed on the following chart.

SALADS

Better Choices	Poor Choices
Lettuce, cabbage, beets, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, jicama, onions, beans, green peas, radishes, sprouts, sweet peppers	Spinach, tomato, avocado, artichoke, kidney beans, garbanzo beans, seeds, nuts
Pasta salad, macaroni salad	Potato salad
Beet salad	Three-bean salad
Coleslaw	Greek salad with olives, relishes, pickles
Fruit cup or salad, canned fruit cocktail, canned peaches or pears, fresh or canned pineapple, mandarin oranges	Salad containing melon, oranges, bananas, kiwi, dried fruit, starfruit
Gelatin salads (plain or with low-potassium fruits or vegetables added)	



Appetizers:

- Look for fresh, simple items to avoid a heavy salt or fluid load before your meal.
- If you need to limit protein, a high-protein appetizer can be used as your main course. Portions are usually smaller and less expensive. Some examples are listed on the following chart and will vary with the type of restaurant.
- Use nutrition apps to learn sodium content of food.

APPETIZERS	
Better Choices	Poor Choices
Garden salads with thin dressing and chicken or shrimp	Cottage cheese, cheese fondue, other cheese dishes, anchovies
Chicken, pork, or steak tostadas	Quiche, cheese sticks
Crab cakes, steamed clams, fried calamari, most shrimp dishes	Oysters
Crab Louis salad	Nachos, potato skins
Green salad with meat or fish, or chef’s salad without ham or cheese (request dressing on the side)	Chopped liver or pâté; salted or smoked meat, fish, or poultry, such as ham, lox or smoked turkey; soup, bouillon, or consommé
Others: meat balls, chicken wings, pot stickers and dumplings (without dipping sauces)	

LOW-PROTEIN APPETIZERS

Better Choices	Poor Choices
Garden salad with thin dressing	Caesar dressing with raw egg
Fried zucchini, mushrooms, or onion rings	Salted chips
Fresh fruit such as berries	Melon



Entrées:

- Portions served in restaurants may be much larger than what you eat at home. When dining out, estimate an amount close to what you normally have. Plan to take the remainder home, or split the meal with another person in your group.



Tip

Three ounces of cooked meat, fish, or poultry is about the size of a deck of cards. Or, if you weigh meat portions at home, measure them against your hand to use as a guide when eating away from home,

- Grilled items are good choices because you can request how you want them prepared.
- Request that salt not be added when cooking (use apps to determine sodium content if the restaurant does not prepare food on site).
- Request that gravies or sauces be served on the side.
- Avoid mixed dishes or casseroles, which are usually higher in sodium and phosphorus.
- Remove the skin from poultry and any crusts from fried foods to decrease sodium content.
- It is best NOT to add steak sauce, Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, or hot sauce because of the high sodium content.
- Lemon or lime juice and vinegar make good sauces and will bring out a lot of the natural flavor of foods. Black pepper will add zest to the food without making you thirsty.

ENTRÉES

Better Choices	Poor Choices
Beef (broiled or grilled steaks, burgers without cheese, prime rib roast or hot roast beef sandwiches), chicken (baked, fried, grilled, or roasted), leg of lamb, lamb chops, veal, meatloaf	Mixed dishes, beef or lamb stew, liver and onions, cured or salted meats (ham, corned beef, sausage, prosciutto, chorizo)
Fish or seafood (grilled, steamed, or poached)	Bouillabaisse, oysters, lobster Newburg, lox
Seafood or meat kabobs	Sauces (especially cheese or tomato), gravies
Fajitas, meat or chicken tacos (no cheese), bean dishes when used in place of meat	Chili con carne, guacamole, avocados
Omelets with sauce served on the side	Omelets with bacon, cheese, ham, sausage
Sandwiches (request no cheese): roast beef, chicken, egg, turkey, hot roast beef or turkey, fresh seafood sandwich. Use lettuce, fresh tomato slice, peppers, and onions for condiments. Limit use of sauces, mustard, and catsup.	Submarine sandwiches, toasted cheese, BLT, bacon, hamburger, Reuben, tuna (canned) salad

Side Dishes:

Knowing your kidney diet when eating out will make it easier to choose appropriate foods. Eating out more than 3 times a week will make it difficult to limit sodium.

- Choose healthy grains and vegetables such as rice, noodles, and green beans (without added salt and sauces).

- Mashed potatoes are lower in potassium than baked potatoes.
- If your meal does not include a good choice for your diet, request a substitute on the menu.
- Ask that sauces be omitted or served on the side.



Tip

If you need to restrict potassium, avoid higher-potassium fruits and vegetables during the day before eating out.



SIDE DISHES	
Better Choices	Poor Choices
Noodles or pasta, pesto pasta, macaroni salad	Pasta in tomato sauce, cheese sauce, or alfredo sauce
Steamed rice, rice pilaf, rice with peas	Baked white and sweet potatoes, fried rice
Unsalted breadsticks, bread, or rolls	Rolls with cheese
Lower-potassium vegetables, like asparagus, cabbage, cooked carrots, corn, eggplant, green peas, zucchini, corn on the cob, coleslaw, lettuce salad	Baked or barbecued beans, refried beans, higher-potassium vegetables, like stewed tomatoes, spinach, collard greens, artichokes, acorn squash and others. High-sodium vegetables like sauerkraut, pickled vegetables



Tip

It you are on a phosphate binder (also called a phosphorus binder) remember to take them with your meal. Carry it with you and keep some in the car so it is always easily available.

Desserts:

- Ask for a clear description of the dessert. Choose desserts that have few ingredients to avoid “hidden” phosphorus and potassium.
- Choices with chocolate, cream cheese, ice cream, or nuts will be much higher in potassium and phosphorus. Avoid these, share with a friend, or just eat a small amount.
- If you need to restrict fluids, desserts such as fruit ice, gelatin, sorbet, and sherbet add to your fluid intake for the day.
- Sweets may or may not be desirable for you. Always follow the advice of your dietitian, who is more familiar with your individual needs.

DESSERTS	
Better Choices	Poor Choices
Angel food, apple, lemon, pound, spice, white or yellow cake may be topped with whipped cream and low-potassium fruit	Cakes rich in chocolate, coconut, dried fruit or nuts, such as carrot, chocolate mousse, devil’s food, fruit or German chocolate cake
Sugar cookies, Lorna Doones®, vanilla wafers, lemon creme and butter cookies	Brownies, chocolate, coconut macaroons
Fruit ice, sherbet, sorbet	Ice cream or frozen yogurt
Lower-potassium fruit desserts like berries, strawberry shortcake, gelatin desserts	Fruits higher in potassium, like bananas, oranges, or kiwi
Pies, tarts or cobblers made with apple, blueberry, cherry, lemon meringue, or strawberry	Pies like banana cream, chocolate cream, coconut, minced meat, pecan, pumpkin, sweet potato, or cheese cake



Specialized or Ethnic Restaurants:

An enjoyable aspect of eating out is trying different ethnic and regional foods. Follow these suggestions for making wise choices.

CHINESE

Caution: May be very high in sodium.

- Request no MSG (monosodium glutamate), soy or fish sauce in food preparation. (The menu may include this information.)
- Avoid restaurants that cook in “bulk”; look for those that prepare foods individually. You may call in advance to get this information.
- Avoid adding soy sauce to the food after it is served. Most Chinese restaurants will provide a hot pepper oil. This can be added to make the food spicier, if desired.
- Soups served with the meal are usually high in sodium and may add undesired fluid weight.
- Choose lower-potassium vegetables, such as snow peas, string beans, water chestnuts, bean sprouts, and bok choy. Request stir-fried vegetables that are not served in heavy sauces.



- Steamed rice is more authentic and has less sodium than fried rice.
- The tea is often served in a pot on the table. If you need to restrict fluids, control the amount poured into your cup to help control your fluid weight gain.
- Enjoy your fortune cookie knowing you have made the best choices.

FRENCH

Caution: May be very high in phosphorus.

- French restaurants usually use fresh ingredients, but cream and butter may be added in large amounts.
- Try to avoid those foods prepared in cheese or cream sauces. Careful questioning of the server can help you make your decision.
- Choose low-potassium fruits and vegetables, and avoid high-potassium fried potatoes (*pommes frites*).

- French bread is a good choice, low in sodium, potassium, and phosphorus. The butter served is usually “sweet” or unsalted.
- Select a simple, light vinaigrette for salad dressing.
- Desserts are always a highlight. Look for sorbets (count as fluid), cakes, meringues, or fruits, such as plums, berries or cherries, that are not covered in heavy cream sauces or chocolate.

MEXICAN

Caution: May be very high in potassium.

- Put aside the salted chips and salsa that might be at the table when you first sit down. Ask for unsalted chips and a small bowl of fresh pico de gallo for less sodium and potassium.
- Order à la carte. Some good items are tacos, tostadas, and fajitas.
- Beware of the salsas and limit to 1 to 2 tablespoons daily. Salsa verde is a green sauce but is made of green tomatoes. Salsas made of chili peppers without tomatoes added are the best choices. Remember, guacamole is made from avocados, which are very high in potassium.
- Corn or homemade flour tortillas are good bread substitutes. Enjoy them!

- For dessert, try the sopapillas (fried dough) with honey, which are a good choice because they are low in potassium and phosphorus. Pastries are high in saturated fat, however, so make sure to eat them in moderate portions.
- Ask for less cheese.

ASIAN INDIAN

Caution: May be very high in phosphorus.

- Indian meals are often vegetarian. Beans may be appropriate to eat in place of meat. Ask your kidney dietitian about portion sizes.
- Enjoy experimenting with different flavors. Masala, tandoori, and curry preparations are widely available on menus as both chicken and vegetable entrées.
- Remember to ask which vegetables are included in dishes. Make low potassium choices if your blood potassium level is too high.
- Yogurt is often served as a side dish or as part of side dishes, but remember it is a dairy food and high in phosphorus.
- A large selection of Indian breads, fried, baked, or roasted, are served with most meals or are available as separate orders.
- Most desserts contain milk or milk powder in the recipe and will be high in phosphorus. Remember to take your phosphate binders if prescribed.

ITALIAN

Caution: May be very high in potassium.

- Beware of antipasto appetizers that contain salty sausages and pickled or marinated vegetables. These foods could get your meal off to a salty, high-fat start. Also, pass on minestrone soup, which is high in salt and potassium.
- Request an oil and vinegar dressing for salad.
- Italian bread is a good choice. Dipping bread in olive oil is a healthy alternative to spreading butter on it. Olive oil contains heart-healthy fats, not the large amount of animal fat in butter.
- Tomato sauces are poor choices, but pastas are served with many sauces that are not tomato based. If you do select one with tomato sauce, request that it be served on the side. Limit cheese and white sauces.
- If you choose pizza, look for a light or vegetarian topping, and request that the tomato sauce and cheese be used lightly. It is best to avoid pepperoni or sausage pizzas, which are high in sodium. Other available toppings may include chicken or fish, both good choices.
- Pesto or garlic & oil are good examples of pasta sauces that are low in potassium.
- One tablespoon of shredded Parmesan or Romano cheese may be used for flavor. Pepper flakes may be used liberally.
- Italian ices are good dessert choices, but remember to count them as fluid.

JAPANESE

Caution: May be very high in sodium.

- Avoid the salty soups, like miso, served at the beginning of the meal.
- Request no MSG (monosodium glutamate) and avoid soy sauce.
- Sushi can be a good choice, because portions are small. Avoid raw fish choices because they may expose you to parasitic infections. Other rolls include cucumbers and cooked shrimp, crab, or eel. Avoid raw and undercooked foods if you have a kidney transplant.
- Try the yakitori, or food grilled on skewers over a charcoal fire. Foods fried in tempura batter are good choices if not dipped in high-sodium sauces.
- Tofu, or soybean curd, is used regularly in Japanese cooking. It is substituted for meat in the kidney diet. Be aware that it is often cooked with soy sauce for added flavor.
- Japanese steak houses offer good choices of grilled meat and vegetables, but portions may be large. Limit portion size of meat if you need to restrict protein.

SOUL FOOD

Caution: May be high in sodium, potassium, and phosphorus.

- Soul food is very challenging to the kidney diet because it is frequently high in sodium, potassium, and phosphorus, as well as fat.
- Salted and cured meats, such as ham, sausages, bacon, and salt pork should be avoided. Bacon and bacon fat are used extensively in the cooking.
- Organ meats, such as chitterlings, are higher in phosphorus than cuts of muscle meat. Limit these to occasional use.
- Dried beans and black-eyed peas are high in phosphorus and potassium. Limit these to small amounts (1–2 tablespoons).
- Cooked greens and spinach are popular. Both are high potassium vegetables. Mustard greens are slightly lower in potassium.
- Yams and sweet potato pie are high in potassium.
- Best meal choices might include fried chicken (with skin removed), corn, string beans or okra, wilted lettuce, corn bread, butter, and banana cake, apple cake or peach cobbler for dessert. Enjoy, and don't forget your phosphate binders.

Fast Foods:

Eating at fast-food restaurants is not totally out of the question. It does, however, take some thought and planning. While many fast-food items are pre-salted, there may be some items that are prepared without salt. You can also avoid high-sodium condiments, such as BBQ or soy sauce, and limit others, such as catsup, to one package.

Many fast-food restaurants provide nutrition information, so you can check the sodium and potassium content. Your dietitian can also provide this information and tell you the specific amounts of sodium and potassium allowed in your diet.

FAST FOODS	
Better Choices	Poor Choices
Regular or junior-size hamburgers	Large, super- or king-size hamburgers or cheeseburgers
Roast beef or turkey sandwiches	Sandwiches with bacon, sauces or cheese
Grilled or broiled chicken sandwiches, tuna or chicken salad	Fried or breaded chicken sandwiches, chicken nuggets or strips
Unsalted onion rings	French fries, Tater Tots®, potato chips, baked potatoes, potato salad, baked beans
Lettuce salads, coleslaw, macaroni salad, fresh tomato slice	High-potassium foods from the salad bar or pickles
Non-cola soda, lemonade, tea and coffee, water	Milk shakes and cola sodas

Where can you get more information?

If you have questions, speak with your healthcare team. They know you and can answer questions.

If you want to read more about chronic kidney disease (CKD), the National Kidney Foundation has more than 50 other publications that cover many subjects such as:

- CKD risk factors, like high blood pressure and diabetes.
- Complications of CKD, such as heart disease, anemia, or bone problems.
- Nutrition for people with CKD, with information about carbohydrates, protein, sodium, phosphorus, and potassium.
- Treating kidney disease early.
- Treating kidney failure with transplantation or dialysis.

There are two ways to learn about the many free resources available to you:

- Call the NKF Cares Patient Help Line toll free at **855.NKF.CARES** (855.653.2273).
- Visit the National Kidney Foundation website at **[kidney.org/store](https://www.kidney.org/store)**.

All publications are free, but there is a limit of five per person. Becoming an educated patient is very important to being healthy

Setting a standard for care

The National Kidney Foundation, through its *Kidney Disease Outcomes Quality Initiative* (KDOQI®), defines stages of kidney disease and offers guidelines that help your healthcare professional and healthcare team make important decisions about your medical treatment.

The information in this booklet is based on those recommended guidelines.



The information contained in this publication is based on current data and expert guidance available at the time of publication. The information is intended to help patients become aware of their disease and its management. This publication is not intended to set out a preferred standard of care and should not be construed as one. Neither should the information be interpreted as prescribing an exclusive course of management. Patients should always consult with their healthcare providers regarding decisions about their individual plan of care.



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Fueled by passion and urgency, the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) is a lifeline for all people affected by kidney disease. As pioneers of scientific research and innovation, we focus on the whole patient through the lens of kidney health. Relentless in our work, we enhance lives through action, education, and accelerating change.

30 E. 33RD ST. | NEW YORK, NY 10016 | 800.622.9010 | [KIDNEY.ORG](https://www.kidney.org)

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