

Eating Well after a Kidney Transplant

Healthy eating after a kidney transplant helps you to recover and stay healthy.

For the first few weeks after transplant

- Eat enough protein.
- Eat more high phosphorus foods if your blood level of phosphorus is low.
- Eat more high magnesium foods if your blood level of magnesium is low.
- Eat lower potassium foods if your blood level of potassium is high.
- Drink enough fluid.

Long-term goals for healthy living after transplant

- Eat less sodium (salt). This helps you maintain a healthy blood pressure and helps prevent carrying extra water.
- Drink enough fluid.
- Manage your blood sugar
- Manage blood levels of cholesterol and triglycerides (fats in your blood).
- Aim for a stable body weight
- Build healthy bones.
- Make sure the food you eat is safe.
- Avoid foods that can affect your medicines.

Following the guidelines in this handout will help you to reach these goals.

Protein

You will need more protein to help heal, fight infection, and improve muscle strength after surgery. Prednisone at high doses may break down muscle protein. Eating more protein helps decrease this muscle breakdown.

Examples of foods to eat at each meal and snack:

- lean meat, fish, chicken
- legumes
- tofu
- eggs
- peanut butter
- low fat milk products (milk, yogurt, cheese)

Phosphorus

After transplant your blood phosphorus level may fall. If your blood phosphorus level is low, choose foods high in phosphorus such as:

- whole grain breads
- bran cereal
- nuts, seeds
- dried beans or lentils
- milk products

If your phosphorus level stays low, your transplant team may ask you to take a phosphorus supplement.

Magnesium

After surgery, your blood magnesium level may fall. If your magnesium level is low, eat more:

- green leafy vegetables
- tofu (firm)
- whole grains
- nuts, seeds
- seafood

If your magnesium level stays low, your transplant team may ask you to take a magnesium supplement.

Potassium

Most people don't need to limit how much potassium they eat after transplant. You can enjoy many different vegetables and fruits.

Some transplant medicines may cause your blood level of potassium to go higher or lower. Talk to your dietitian about how much potassium is right for you.

Fluid

- After transplant, it's important to drink enough fluid.
- Drink 10–12 cups (2.5–3 L) of fluid each day, unless your transplant team suggests other amounts. Water is your best choice.
- **Choose** drinks with no added sugar such as water, low fat milk, carbonated water, decaffeinated tea and coffee; and sugar-free soft drinks and crystal drinks.
- **Limit** caffeine drinks (coffee, tea, and cola) to 3–4 cups (750–1000 mL) a day. Too much caffeine may cause rapid heartbeat and weaker bones.
- **Limit** regular pop, juices, iced tea, fruit drinks, or hot chocolate. These add calories, but have little nutrition.

Tips to drink enough water:

- Keep a bottle of water with you at all times.
- Store water in the fridge to have when you're at home.
- Add a lemon, lime, or cucumber to your water to keep it tasting fresh all day.



Sodium (salt)

High blood pressure and carrying extra fluid are common side effects of anti-rejection medicines.

Sodium acts like a sponge, keeping extra fluid in your body. It can also raise blood pressure. To decrease the sodium you eat:

- Cook and eat food without adding salt.
- Choose fresh, unprocessed, and homemade foods.
- Flavour your food with herbs, spices, garlic, onion, lemon juice, vinegar, and salt-free seasonings.
- Read the Nutrition Facts table on food labels. Choose foods with less sodium.

Managing blood sugar

If you have diabetes before your transplant, work with your kidney transplant team to help manage your blood sugar. This can help protect your new kidney.

If you have never had diabetes, you may develop high blood sugar after your transplant. You're more likely to have high blood sugar if you have a family history, carry extra weight, are inactive, and are older. Transplant medicine may also raise your risk of diabetes after transplant.

Managing your weight, healthy eating habits, and being active can help you manage your blood sugar.

Weight after transplant

After a kidney transplant, many people feel better and have a better appetite. They may also be able to eat a wider variety of foods. These things can lead to weight gain.

Carrying extra weight may increase your risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. It may also put added strain on your transplanted kidney.

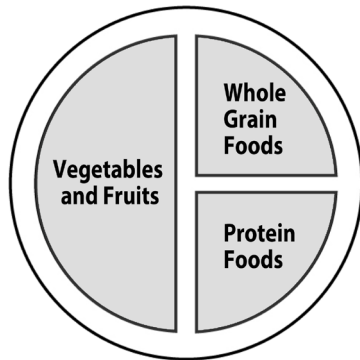
If you have questions about your weight, talk to your transplant team.

Healthy eating

- Eat a variety of foods from Canada's Food Guide.
- Space meals and snacks throughout the day.
- Snacks can keep you from getting hungry if there is a long time between meals. They can help manage blood sugar levels and help you get enough nutrients like fibre, vitamins, and minerals.
- Choose more vegetables and fruit, whole grains and whole grain cereals and breads.
- Choose lower fat milk products (skim or 1%), leaner meats, fish, dried peas, beans, and lentils, and tofu.

Eat Well Plate

A meal that looks like the one below can help you get the nutrients you need.



Active living

Regular activity is very important to your healthy living goals.

Talk to your physical therapist or kinesiologist about the type and amount of activity that's right for you.

Manage cholesterol and triglyceride levels

Anti-rejection medicines may increase your blood levels of cholesterol and triglycerides and increase your risk of heart disease and stroke.

To help manage your cholesterol and triglyceride levels:

- Limit saturated fat: choose lower fat milk and cheese, leaner meats, beans, peas, and lentils.
- Choose small amounts of healthy fats, like canola and olive oils, and soft margarine.
- Eat more fibre.
- Be active every day.

To help manage your triglyceride levels:

- Carrying extra weight may affect your blood cholesterol and triglycerides. If you're ready to make changes with your weight, speak to your healthcare team.
- Manage your blood sugar.
- Limit alcohol, sugar, and foods with added sugar.

Ask your dietitian for more information about eating for a healthy heart.

Building healthy bones

To help maintain and improve bone health:

- Aim to get 1000 mg of calcium a day from your diet and/or from supplements, unless your doctor or dietitian suggests another amount.
- Take 1000 IU of vitamin D as a supplement daily, unless your doctor or dietitian suggest another amount.
- Be active every day.
- Don't smoke. If you would like help to quit, visit albertaquits.ca.
- You may have a bone mineral density test done to find out how strong your bones are.

Best sources of calcium

Each serving below has **about 300 mg or more of calcium:**

- milk, 1 cup (250 mL)
- plain yogurt, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (175 mL)
- hard cheese, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz (50 g)
- fortified plant-based beverages, like soy, almond, and rice beverages, 1 cup (250 mL)
- tofu made with calcium $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (150 g)



Food safety

Anti-rejection medicines increase your risk of getting sick from bacteria in food.

Tips to increase food safety:

- Wash your hands, cutting boards, counters, and utensils often when you prepare food.
- Make sure meat, poultry, fish, and eggs are thoroughly cooked before eating.
- Store food carefully. Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot.
- When dining out, don't eat at buffets or salad bars as these have more of a risk for food contamination.
- Avoid unpasteurized milk, cheese, honey, and juices.

If you want more information about food safety:

- Talk to your dietitian.
- Visit canada.ca. Select "Health", then "Food and nutrition", then "[Food safety](#)".



Are there any foods I need to avoid?

Some foods affect the medicines you take.

If you take cyclosporine, tacrolimus, sirolimus, or blood pressure medicines, avoid:

- grapefruit
- pomelo and tangelo fruits
- star fruit
- juices or drinks made with the fruits above (read the labels of juice blends and other fruit drinks)

Herbal supplements

Before taking any over-the-counter vitamin, mineral, herbal products or teas, talk with your kidney transplant team. Herbal supplements and some teas may interact with your medicines.

Below are some of the herbal supplements that are harmful for kidney transplant patients:

Astragalus (evening primrose), echinacea, and ginseng: Blocks the effects of your anti-rejection medicines.

St. John's wort, goldenseal, and alfalfa: May interact with cyclosporine, tacrolimus, and sirolimus and change drug levels. This increases the chance that your new organ is rejected, and that you have side effects from your medicines.

Bilberry, cayenne, feverfew, ginkgo, ginseng, ginger pills and garlic pills: May cause bleeding by increasing the effects of medicines that reduce clotting, like aspirin or warfarin (Coumadin®).

Mouth care

Your anti-rejection medicines may cause a fungal infection in your mouth. You can help prevent these infections by brushing your teeth at least two times every day and flossing once a day.

My Goals

This handout includes lifestyle choices that can help you manage your kidney transplant. Change can be hard, especially if we try to make too many changes at once.

If you're ready to make a change, it can help to set a goal, then break it into small steps. You're more likely to achieve smaller goals.

Ask your healthcare provider if you would like support with goal setting.

For more support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on ahs.ca/811.
- Visit ahs.ca/nutrition.