

Phosphorus and Your Kidneys

Understanding phosphorus in food and CKD

Why does phosphorus matter?

Phosphorus works with calcium and vitamin D to support bones and other body functions. With more advanced CKD, phosphorus balance can become abnormal. Over time, mineral imbalance can contribute to bone and blood-vessel problems.

Your phosphorus goal depends on your kidney function and laboratory results. Not every patient with CKD needs the same restriction.

Natural phosphorus

- Dairy products
- Meat, poultry and fish
- Beans and lentils
- Nuts and seeds
- Whole grains

Added phosphorus

- Processed meats
- Fast foods
- Packaged convenience foods
- Some cola beverages
- Processed cheese products
- Foods with phosphate additives

Why additives deserve attention

Phosphorus additives are common in processed foods and can contribute substantially to phosphorus intake. Look for ingredients containing the letters **phos**, such as phosphoric acid, sodium phosphate, calcium phosphate, or pyrophosphate.

Fresh and minimally processed foods generally make it easier to limit phosphorus additives.

Tips for Controlling Phosphorus

Practical choices for meals and labels

Choose more often

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Rice and pasta
- Fresh meats without phosphate additives
- Home-cooked meals using simple ingredients
- Foods with shorter ingredient lists

Limit when advised

- Processed meats and deli meats with phosphate additives
- Processed cheese products
- Large amounts of dairy
- Cola beverages containing phosphoric acid
- Highly processed packaged foods

If you take a phosphorus binder

Take it exactly as prescribed. Binders are generally taken with meals or snacks containing phosphorus so they can bind phosphorus from food. The dose and timing may vary, so follow your nephrologist or dialysis team's instructions.

Label-reading shortcut

- Scan the ingredient list for words containing "phos."
- Compare similar products; one may have phosphate additives while another does not.
- Nutrition labels do not always list phosphorus, so the ingredient list is often more useful.

Do not avoid nutritious foods unnecessarily. Your nephrologist or renal dietitian can help balance phosphorus control with adequate protein and overall nutrition.