

Protein and Your Kidneys

Finding the right balance for CKD and dialysis

Why does protein matter?

Protein supports muscles, skin, immune function, healing, and many other body processes. Your protein needs depend on your stage of kidney disease, whether you receive dialysis, your nutrition status, and other medical conditions.

Protein needs are different before dialysis and during dialysis. Your nephrologist or dietitian should individualize your target.

CKD not on dialysis

- A moderate protein intake is often recommended.
- Very high-protein diets may increase the kidney's workload.
- Choose appropriate portions of high-quality protein.
- Plant-forward meals can be useful when they fit your potassium and phosphorus plan.

Hemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis

- Protein needs are usually higher because dialysis can increase protein losses.
- Include a good protein source with meals.
- Poor appetite or unintentional weight loss should be reported.
- Your dialysis dietitian can help set a daily protein target.

Avoid bodybuilding-style high-protein diets or protein supplements unless your kidney clinician or dietitian specifically recommends them.

Common protein sources

- Poultry and fish
- Eggs
- Lean meats
- Dairy products, when appropriate for your phosphorus plan
- Beans, lentils, tofu and other plant proteins, when appropriate for your potassium/phosphorus plan

Building Balanced Meals

Practical protein choices without overdoing portions

Helpful habits

- Spread protein across meals rather than eating most of it at one sitting.
- Pair protein with vegetables, grains, or other foods that fit your kidney and diabetes plan.
- Limit heavily processed meats such as bacon, sausage, and many deli meats.
- Avoid automatically adding protein powders, shakes, or bars.
- If you are losing weight or have poor appetite, tell your kidney team rather than simply restricting more foods.

A simple meal framework

Meal	Example
Breakfast	Egg plus toast and fruit that fits your potassium plan
Lunch	Small portion of grilled chicken or another protein, rice or bread, and vegetables
Dinner	Fish or lean meat with a grain/starch and cooked vegetables
Snack	Individualized option based on protein, potassium, phosphorus, diabetes, and calorie needs

Remember

There is no single protein target that is right for everyone with kidney disease. Age, body size, CKD stage, urine protein loss, dialysis, diabetes, weight changes, and overall nutrition all matter.

Ask your nephrologist or renal dietitian for your personal daily protein goal before making major dietary changes.