

Ask the Expert: Diet and Kidney Cancer - Part One



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The answers are the opinion from Bruno Mafrici, RD, MSc, NMP. Bruno is a renal dietitian with a strong interest in kidney disease and dialysis. The answers were composed based on his experience and evidence from January 2023. The following answers do not replace the advice from health care professionals. We strongly advise that patients also ask these types of questions to their GP, oncologist, clinical nurse specialist, dietitian, and/or their own health care professional team.



If you have kidney cancer and have good kidney function, should you adjust your diet?



People with a good kidney function should follow the principles of a healthy diet. There are not specific recommendations to protect the longevity of the remaining kidney. Usually, a diet which is low in salt, does not exceed in the amount of animal protein rich in fruit and vegetable healthy fats and high in fibre with plenty of fluid is a sensible approach.



At what kidney function level do you need to start changing your diet?



Some people, but not all (and this is important to remember) may need to change their diet if their kidney function falls below 30%. This is when the estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) goes below 30ml/min. However, this will depend on several factors: your current nutritional status, your weight, your blood results, your urine analysis, your medication, treatment, and any other co-morbidities. Therefore, it is very individual. Your doctor, nurse or dietitian will be able to advise you on this at an individual and tailored level.

| 5 Stages of Kidney Disease | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | Kidney Function/GFR | Description |
| Stage 1 | >90% | Normal or high function |
| Stage 2 | 60-88% | Mildly decreased function |
| Stage 3 | 30-59% | Mild to moderately decreased function |
| Stage 4 | 15-29% | Severely decreased function |
| Stage 5 | < 15% | Kidney failure |



What would you remove and add if you were to change your diet if you find yourself with a GFR below 30ml/min?



Again, this is very individual. Many, but not all, may be limiting processed food, salt and food with a very high salt content. Some may benefit from limiting food high in potassium and/or in phosphate but based on my experience many patients with kidney cancer will not need this.



What is a healthy diet?



The British Dietetic Association (BDA) in the UK defined healthy eating as having a balance of different foods and nutrients in the diet for good health and wellbeing. It is not about 'dieting'. It does not have to be boring or difficult. Healthy eating is about enjoying your food, at the same time being mindful about what you eat. More information is freely available in their website: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resourceDetail/printPdf/?resource=healthy-eating>



What is the daily recommended fluid intake and why?



Usually we would recommend 1500-2000ml (3-3.5 pints) of fluid a day for most people. There are some equations too which may help (and your dietitian can help you to tailor your fluid) but 6-8 glasses (3-3.5 pints) a day is considered to be a standard that we all should drink. Maintaining good hydration is essential for our body to function and preventing

dehydration is very important, probably even more important if we have a problem with our kidney.



I get diarrhoea when on treatment – what is the best diet regime to adopt to slow this down and does diarrhoea make my drugs less effective if they go through my system quickly?



Usually ensure you drink plenty of fluid and try to eat little and often during the day. Dry food may be better tolerated (dry toast, rice, plain boiled chicken). Limiting very spicy food may also help. If you get diarrhoea during treatment I would strongly suggest getting in touch with your nurse or with your doctor so they may be able to adjust your treatment and if the diarrhoea persists, they may decide to do further investigations or help you with some drugs.

Probiotics may be considered, especially after treatment, but again I would discuss this with your specialist nurse, doctor, or dietitian. Diarrhoea does not always make drug therapy less effective. It really depends on where the drugs are absorbed in the gut.



Same question for constipation: what are the best foods to prevent constipation and what should we cut out?



If you suffer from constipation, there is a lot you can try with your diet before seeking help from drugs. Ensure you have plenty of fluid during day and, if you can, be mobile (walking). You can increase your fibre intake by eating more fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as choosing whole grains, seeds, nuts, and dry fruit. If these methods do not work do speak to your nurse, doctor, or pharmacist as there are a lot of medication that can help.

Thank you!