

## Ask the Expert: Diet and Kidney Cancer- Part two



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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.



**We hear a lot about diet fads such as the keto diet – are these safe for patients with one kidney, poor eGFR or patients on treatment?**



*I would also check with a dietitian or health care professional before starting any fad diets especially if you have a low kidney function and/or if you are on treatment. For example, a keto diet is very low in carbohydrate and high in protein and fat which is not favourable in a person with an eGFR below 30ml/min (stage 4 kidney disease). This is because high protein intake may increase the pressure delivered to the kidney which will need to work harder.*



**If patients with kidney cancer are told to lose weight, what is the recommended way to do this? Limit calories?**



*If your dietitian, doctor, nurse, or health care professional asks you to lose weight, both limiting the total number of calories that you eat together with regular exercise can help. There is often a misconception that people with cancer should not do exercise. Instead, evidence shows that exercise, even if minimal, can help with muscle tone. The issue is that treatment can affect how well patients feel.*



**What is the daily recommended fluid intake and why?**



*Usually we would recommend 1500-2000ml 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 a day is 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 kidneys.



**Is a vegetarian/vegan diet good for kidney cancer patients on and off treatment?**



People with kidney cancer can have a vegetarian and/or vegan diet, providing that they have enough protein in their diet. Sometimes some vitamins many need to be checked to prevent deficiently (for example in people who follow a strict vegan diet I would consider checking their vitamin B12 at least once a year, and only take vitamin B12 supplements if advised by your health care professional). There is no reason why people with kidney cancer on or off treatment should not follow a vegetarian or vegan diet.



**Is it okay to take vitamins and supplements? Are there any additional supplements/vitamins which you think will help patients stay as healthy as possible?**



Vitamins and supplements are often seen as not harmful. In my opinion, if you are having a healthy and balanced diet there is no need to take any vitamins and/or mineral supplements. The only exception is vitamin D, and [Public Health England](#) recommends 10 microgram (400IU) a day during the autumn and winter months. However, before taking any supplements, including vitamin D, I would strongly suggest you discuss this with your oncologist. We do vary as human beings and is important that when it comes to vitamins and supplements these are tailored to our individual needs. Also remember that dietitians can help you to tailor these and give advice to meet your own unique needs!



**What are the best websites to read about a renal friendly diet if you have a low kidney function?**



You can find a lot of information on the following charity websites (please click on the blue text to reach the website):

- [Kidney Care UK \(specifically the Kidney Kitchen\)](#)
- [National Kidney Federation](#)



**Where is the best website to go to for evidence-based information about supplements and herbal remedies.**



There are 3 main considerations that I discuss with my patients when they ask me about supplements and herbal remedies available over the counter:

- 1) Supplements and herbal remedies are (mostly) excreted by the kidney so, if you have a low renal function you need to be aware that some may do more harm than good (for example patients on dialysis should avoid large doses of vitamin A as their level are already elevated)
- 2) Supplements and herbal remedies may well interact with your treatment and/ or other drugs that you are prescribed as they may compete for absorption by our bodies or the same molecular target for effectiveness

- 3) *Before taking any supplements or herbal remedies I would strongly advise you to discuss this with your oncology team, doctor, or pharmacist. Many hospitals have services (in my hospital it is called 'medicine information') where health care professionals can ask individual questions to specialist pharmacists and tailor these to individual patients.*



**What is the BRAT diet?**



*A BRAT diet is a diet which is used temporary in patients with nausea, sickness, and diarrhoea. In the past it was recommended for children. The term stand for Banana, Rice, Apple sauce and Toast. There is not much evidence to support its use, but it does not hurt to follow this for a very short term (i.e., less than a week). Bananas are high in potassium so providing that your potassium is within normal levels, this should be OK. Longer term, this diet is low in protein and healthy fat as well as fibre. In my opinion the symptoms should be addressed.*



**It is suggested we need to take care when eating protein, but if you are looking to lose weight and also do weight training it is recommended to eat more protein. What do you suggest we include in our diet that are good sources of protein and how much we should eat a day?**



*The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends, for the general adult population, a protein intake of 0.75-0.8g protein per kg of body weight (this will apply to people with a body mass index, BMI, between 18.5-24.9kg/m<sup>2</sup>). There are several guidelines on protein requirements in the presence of kidney disease. Most guidelines agree that if your renal function is less than 30ml/min (stage 4 kidney disease) then you should aim not to exceed 0.8g protein/kg/body weight. Some guidelines in the USA suggest less but the evidence is not clear and previous large studies on protein in patients with kidney disease have shown inconclusive results. People with kidney cancer may differ and their protein intake can be estimated if you see a dietitian or discuss with a health professional. Usually during weight training protein and carbohydrate consumption is also addressed and people with kidney cancer may be able to increase their intake of natural sources of protein. Creatine and/or protein supplements are not usually recommended, unless you discuss this with a qualified member of staff, such as a dietitian.*



**I have heard you need to avoid red meat - is that true as I love eating steak?**



*According to the [NHS website](#), red meat (such as beef, lamb and pork) can form part of a healthy diet. But eating a lot of red and processed meat probably increases your risk of bowel (colorectal) cancer. Some experts advise to limit red meat not more than once or twice a month.*



**I have heard we have to avoid tomatoes - they are a core ingredient of many recipes and salads. Is this true, and if so, why should we avoid them?**



*Tomatoes should never be avoided. They are high in potassium and some people with kidney disease with a high potassium level may be asked to limit their consumption (but I would never say to a person to avoid them altogether). Some people with high potassium levels may be asked to avoid large quantities (like tomato soup or tomato juice). However, a small fresh tomato or 2-4 cherry tomatoes a day in a salad are unlikely to have a significant effect on your level. If you are advised to follow a low potassium diet asked to be referred to a dietitian as what matters is the overall diet rather than focusing on specific food.*



**I take several supplements such as cider vinegar tablets, collagen tablets - I am having a partial nephrectomy, is it safe to continue with supplements post surgery?**



*I would discuss this with your surgeon. Usually, I would suggest stopping taking any over the counter supplements at least 1-2 weeks before surgery or any treatment. However, I would suggest you discuss with your doctor, oncologist, surgeon and/or nurse and list all the supplements that you take over the counter (OTC) as well as any OTC medication and/or any multivitamins and/or any herbal remedies. Many hospitals have a service called medicine information or similar where an expert pharmacist can look at these individual questions for you and the most recent scientific evidence in detail and help you to make an informed decision.*

Thank you