



# Kidney Transplant Diet

After a kidney transplant, it is important for your child to have a diet that helps keep them healthy and that keeps the new kidney working well.

## Drinking plenty of fluids

Most children need to drink 8 cups (2 liters) or more of fluid per day to keep their new kidney working well. Some children need to drink more than this. Your child's doctors and transplant nurse will let you know how much your child needs to drink. Here are a few tips:

- 1 liter = 1000 milliliters = 33 ounces = 4 cups
- Keep track of your child's fluid intake during the day.
- Measure out how much fluid your child needs each day. Put this in a water bottle (you might need to refill it during the day for you child to meet their fluid goals). Carry the water bottle with you at all times to make sure your child drinks all the water they need.
- Milk, juice, formula and oral supplements like PediaSure and Suplena count towards total fluid intake. They may help your child meet their fluid goals.

## Limit salt

Eating a lot of salt can make your child retain water. This can cause problems like high blood pressure and having parts of the body swell with fluid (edema). Having your child eat less salt may help prevent some of these problems. Have your child avoid or limit fast food, table salt and salty seasonings, condiments and sauces. Your child's dietitian will tell you how much salt is OK for your child to eat. See our handout "Low-Sodium Eating" at [www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE386.pdf](http://www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE386.pdf) and "Lower-Sodium Fast Food" at [www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE272.pdf](http://www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE272.pdf).

Be careful of using salt substitutes, or salt-flavored products that say "low-sodium" or "no sodium." Some of these have a lot of potassium, and this can be a problem if your child needs to restrict potassium.

## Eating foods that have a lot of phosphorus

Newly transplanted kidneys often "waste" phosphorus. This means they do not absorb phosphorus that your child's body needs. It is a good idea to have your child eat more high-phosphorus foods after transplant. These include:

- Nonfat or 1% milk
- Nonfat or low-fat yogurt
- Natural cheeses (such as regular cheddar or part-skim mozzarella)
- Whole grains, nuts and legumes
- Frozen yogurt or ice cream (limit these to sometimes)

### **Eating foods that have a lot of magnesium**

Most transplant patients take immunosuppressive medicines. These help the body not to reject the new kidney. These can cause your child's body to get rid of magnesium. For this reason, your child might take a magnesium supplement to make sure they get enough. Use a magnesium supplement only if recommended by your health care provider. Check with your healthcare provider first before giving any type of supplements to your child. Eating foods high in magnesium is helpful. If your child eats high-magnesium foods, they may not need to take as many supplements. Here is a list of foods high in magnesium:

- Green vegetables, especially spinach
- Nuts and seeds
- Whole grains
- Halibut
- Black beans and other legumes

For snack and recipe ideas, see our handout "Magnesium Food Sources" at [www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE785.pdf](http://www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE785.pdf).

### **Limiting sugar**

If your child is taking steroids or tacrolimus, it is important for them not to eat too much sugar. This helps to keep blood sugars normal.

- If your child drinks juice, it is important to limit intake of fruit juice to 8 ounces each day. You can dilute juice with water.
- Serve fresh fruit or fruit canned in its own juice. Avoid fruit canned in heavy syrup.
- Limit how much your child eats very sweet foods like cookies, cakes, ice cream, pastries, candy, jams, jellies and syrups.
- Limit how many high-sugar drinks your child has, like Kool-Aid, soda pop, juice boxes, Snapple, etc.

### **Food safety**

Your child's immune system is not as strong as usual because of the medicines they are taking. For this reason, it is important for them to avoid foods that may make them sick (food-borne illness). Also, pay special attention to hygiene and hand-washing. Foods to avoid include:

- Raw and undercooked meat and seafood (no sushi)
- Foods that contain raw eggs, like salad dressings, cookie dough, etc.
- Cold luncheon and deli meats
- Unpasteurized juice, milk and cheese
- Raw nuts and seeds
- Sprouts

### To Learn More

- Your child's dietitian:

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- Nutrition  
206-987-4758
- Ask your child's  
healthcare provider
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital,  
ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the  
hospital, call the  
toll-free Family  
Interpreting Line  
1-866-583-1527. Tell  
the interpreter the  
name or extension you  
need.

### Other things to watch for

#### Eating foods low in potassium

Medicines that affect your child's immune system might also cause the amount of potassium in their blood to be too high temporarily. If this is a problem for your child, their renal dietitian will give you a list of high-potassium foods to avoid.

#### Avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice

If your child is taking tacrolimus or cyclosporine, it is important to avoid eating grapefruit or drinking grapefruit juice. Having grapefruit can make it so these medicines do not work as well.

#### Formula feedings

Many children on dialysis or with chronic kidney disease need special formulas to give extra calories, protein and nutrition to help them grow. This usually changes after a transplant. Your child's appetite is likely to improve, and they will probably be able to get enough nutrition from solid food.

Your child might still need formula if their new kidney takes a while to begin working, or if their appetite picks up very slowly. In these cases, your child should continue with formula feedings until they are able to eat enough. Talk with your child's dietitian if you are not sure if your child needs formula.

#### Steroid therapy

Sometimes children take steroids as part of their post-transplant therapy. If their body is rejecting their transplanted kidney, they may have to take large doses of steroids. If your child is taking steroids, see our handout called "What to Eat While Taking Steroids" at [www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE615.pdf](http://www.seattlechildrens.org/pdf/PE615.pdf).

### How long does my child have to follow the post-transplant diet?

Your child will probably need to follow these diet guidelines for as long as they have their transplanted kidney. Your child's nephrologist or dietitian will let you know if your child's diet needs to change in any way.