

WHAT'S NEW IN THE RENAL DIET?

BY JUNE MARTIN, RD, CDE

Nutrition research seems to be constantly evolving and changing! And so does our food supply. This can make life confusing, especially for a kidney patient.

Renal diet recommendations and the foods we are eating have changed dramatically in the fifteen years that I have been practicing.

Label reading is key

When I started as a renal dietitian, we advised our patients to stay away from processed cheeses and colas because these foods contain phosphate additives. Now we spend much of our counselling time focusing on label reading for these different phosphates. Commonly found in meats, cereals, creams, non-dairy creamers and snack foods, phosphates are being increasingly identified as a major contributor to high phosphorus. Check the ingredients lists for: sodium phosphate, phosphoric acid, potassium phosphate, sodium hexametaphosphate, etc.

If you've had the same kidney diet for a long time then I'd strongly suggest a meeting with a renal registered dietitian (RD) for an individualized update. Here are some of the changes:

Phosphorus:

OLD: Use non-dairy creamers (edible oil products) to replace milk in your kidney diet.

NEW: Choose unfortified rice or almond beverage as a better alternative to milk. Many non-dairy creamers have added phosphates.

Potassium:

OLD: Most of the potassium in what we eat comes from fruits, vegetables and dairy products. Avoid high-potassium fruits and vegetables to keep your potassium under control.

NEW: Check food labels on meat for "potassium lactate", a new additive in meats. Just three slices of an oven-roasted turkey breast with potassium lactate has more potassium than a banana! And watch out for low-sodium products that have been treated with "potassium chloride" to replace the taste of sodium. Avoiding high-potassium fruits and vegetables is still important for those on a potassium restriction.

Bioavailability and Digestibility of Phosphorus:

OLD: Choose only white bread, white rice and white pasta to lower your phosphorus intake.

NEW: The phosphorus in whole wheat rice and pasta is very poorly absorbed and most patients can safely include some whole wheat rice and pasta as long as potassium is well controlled.

Vegetarian diets:

OLD: Vegetarian diets are not safe for kidney patients at any stage of chronic kidney disease (CKD).

NEW: In the early stages of CKD, vegetarian protein may actually be beneficial for patients. The higher phosphorus in dry beans and legumes is actually very poorly absorbed. A renal dietitian can help ensure you get enough protein. If you require a low-potassium diet, it is very important to talk to a dietitian about how to safely include vegetarian sources of protein and how to be sure to get the right amount for you.

Bottom line:

No matter what the research says, it's critical that you talk to your healthcare team to find out what applies to you! Your renal dietitian can help you interpret the latest research and explain how it applies to your individual situation.