

Promoting Protein

GOOD NUTRITION IS A MUST

Protein Nutrition tied to longer life

Your mama always said, "Eat, eat, eat!" (Mine also said, "Don't eat your soup with a fork". But that's another story!)

Your mom was right! Loss of appetite is an early warning symptom of kidney failure. Therefore, it is also an early warning symptom of inadequate dialysis (see Dialysis Digest: Adequacy of Dialysis). Loss of appetite can also be caused by constipation as well as other abnormal conditions of the gastrointestinal tract. A 'lazy stomach' (diabetic gastroparesis) can also cause poor nutrition.

IN DIALYSIS, FOOD IS MEDICINE

Food is an important treatment for people with kidney disease. Poor nutrition is **EXTREMELY**

PARTNERS IN DIALYSIS



bad for your health. Of all Protein nutrition and adequate dialysis are the most important correlates to survival on dialysis treatment. Adequate protein nutrition is measured by **serum albumin**. If the albumin level is less than 3.6, the risks of dying or needing hospitalization increase several fold.

IF YOU AREN'T HUNGRY, YOU STILL NEED TO EAT

Food is medicine!!! If you aren't hungry, you still need to eat. You don't swallow pills because they

taste good. You take your pills because they are a necessary part of your treatment. So is food.

There are many reasons why food is important for people being treated with dialysis. Dialysis removes anything that is dissolved in your blood stream, including important vitamins and nutrients. These nutrients must be replaced .

Also, your body continuously rebuilds itself. In order to make healthy tissue, your body needs the building blocks that it cannot manufacture. These "essential" building blocks must be available in your diet. Otherwise, your body will eventually break down! The **essential amino acids** needed to repair and replace protein in the body usually come from dairy products, like eggs, cheese and milk. **BIG PROBLEM** for people who use dialysis!!!!

Why? Because dairy products contain a lot of **phosphorus**, a chemical which can cause bone weakening and accelerated

hardening of the arteries if present in the blood stream in too great a quantity. So, what's a person to do?

Eat more meat!! It doesn't have to be red meat. Lean meat like pork, chicken, turkey and fish are also very good sources of protein. Egg white is an excellent source of protein (egg white is pure albumin).

Like many issues concerning dialysis treatment, it is often easier to talk about solutions than it is to implement them into your every day life. Some people using dialysis don't have a good appetite, even if they aren't constipated or inadequately dialyzed. What can those people do?

WHAT CAN BE DONE IF I'M JUST NOT HUNGRY?

There are several approaches to this important problem. One is to try to stimulate your appetite. No ... marijuana is NOT legal in Network 15!! Sometimes zinc supplementation can help, especially if your loss of appetite is due to loss of taste. There are medicines, like megace, which are used in people with cancer that can sometimes help. Ask your physician before adding any medicines or supplements to your daily routine.

Another solution is to supplement the diet with protein rich powders or liquids. These **protein supplements** are egg white and other non-phosphorus containing proteins.

Supplements seem



expensive. But if you think of protein supplements as groceries, they are not very costly. Compared to the solutions listed in the following paragraph, supplements are downright cheap!

Another solution is to use tube feedings to improve protein intake. Tubes can be inserted through the skin directly into the stomach (called a PEG tube) or, temporarily, through the nose into the stomach (called an NG tube). Once a tube is in place, liquids can be pumped into the stomach at home.

If the gastrointestinal tract can't absorb the nutrients, then the government will pay for intravenous nutrition given during dialysis. This form of nutrition is called intradialytic parenteral nutrition (**IDPN**). This is the simplest way to improve nutrition. Unfortunately, it is also the most expensive. The government will not pay

for IDPN unless a feeding tube has been tried and failed OR medical evidence indicates that the bowel just doesn't work.

Dialysis companies are currently negotiating with the government to lower costs for IDPN thereby increasing its availability. In the meantime, we are asking everyone to concentrate on eating enough protein and calories to stay healthy.

Dialysis companies are also petitioning the government to pay for supplements like egg white powder.

If your **albumin level is less than 3.8**, expect a visit from your dietitian, or make an appointment to visit with her (him).

Let's work hard together to increase your serum albumin level.

Please ask your dietitian for advice about the best ways to do this.

