

# Dining Out With Confidence

A Guide for  
Patients with  
Kidney  
Disease



**NKF** National Kidney  
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*Making Lives Better*

Most people enjoy eating out. This guide gives ideas for making your dining experience fun—even with your special diet. Start by learning your diet well and asking your dietitian for any tips or advice. If you have sodium, potassium, phosphorus or protein restrictions, this booklet will help you make good decisions based on your specific diet needs.

## **Plan ahead**

If you will be eating dinner out, plan breakfast and lunch at home accordingly. Cut back on serving sizes and foods high in sodium and potassium during the day. Call ahead to learn more about the menu and how the food is prepared. Explain that you are following a special diet.

Choose a restaurant where it will be easiest to select foods best suited for your diet. Restaurants where food is made to order are the best choice. Restaurant personnel are accustomed to special requests for food items or methods of preparation. However, many require that you call at least 24 hours in advance to make arrangements.

## **Making your selections**

Look over the menu carefully. Ask your server for more detail about items you do not understand. Practice making special requests about the way your food is prepared or served. Consider sharing a main dish with a friend or family member.

## **Examples of special requests**

For salad dressings, gravies or sauces: "...on the side."

For any grilled, sauteed or baked entrees: "No salt, please."

For Asian foods: "...with no MSG (monosodium glutamate)."

For sandwiches or burgers: "...without cheese." "Mustard and catsup on the side."

## Protein concerns

If your specific diet includes a protein restriction, you may want to request half portions of main dishes that contain meat, poultry, fish or cheese. You could share a main dish with a dining companion. Another option is to take part of your main dish home in a doggy bag.

Don't forget that protein is found in cheese and cream sauces; food prepared with milk, nuts and eggs; and in vegetarian dishes containing dried beans or lentils.

## Guidelines for specific meals or courses

**Breakfast:** Breakfast may be one of the easiest meals to eat out. Most restaurants offer à la carte breakfast items.



### **Beverages:**

**TIP:** Save your fluids throughout the day to allow more when you are eating out.

- ❖ Plan the amount of fluid you may have during the meal.
- ❖ Plan when you want the beverage: before, during or after the meal. Decline offers at other times.

Better Choices	Poor Choices
Eggs, cooked to order	Cured or salted meats or fish, such as ham, sausage, lox and Canadian bacon. Limit bacon to 2 strips occasionally
Omelets with low-potassium vegetables such as mushrooms or squash	Omelets with cheese or above meats; fast-food breakfast sandwiches, breakfast burritos
Toast, bagels, English muffins, croissants, plain or blueberry muffins.	Biscuits and bran muffins
Pancakes, waffles, French toast	Home fries or hash brown potatoes
Margarine, jelly, honey, cinnamon, sugar and syrup	Real maple syrup or gravy
Low-potassium fruits and juices such as applesauce or apple juice	Fruits and juices such as orange juice or a fresh grapefruit half
Hot and cold cereals	Bran cereals and granola with nuts, seeds or wheat germ
Donuts, Danish pastry, sweet rolls, coffee cake	Pastries containing chocolate, nuts, coconut or caramel

- ❖ Choose beverages low in potassium and phosphorus. (Ask your dietitian for specific guidelines.)
- ❖ Request that your glass or cup not be refilled. Order beverages by the glass instead of ordering a pitcher of drinks.
- ❖ Squeeze lemon wedges in your water to help quench your thirst.
- ❖ Turn cups or glasses upside down before they are filled, or ask to have them removed.
- ❖ Push your glass or cup away from your plate when you are finished to avoid refills.

Better Choices	Poor Choices
Cocktails mixed with club soda, ginger ale, tonic or soft drinks (except colas)	Cocktails mixed with fruit juice, tomato juice, vegetable cocktail, milk, cream or ice cream
Wine, red or white, if potassium is counted (substitute for a fruit)	Beer
Noncola soft drinks such as Sprite, Seven-Up or orange soda	Any cola
Iced tea or coffee	Cocoa, milk, milk shakes, cocoa mixes
Lemonade, limeade, water	Orange juice-type drinks, tomato juice, vegetable juice

### **Appetizers:**

- ❖ Look for fresh, simple items to avoid a heavy salt or fluid load before your meal.
- ❖ A high-protein appetizer can be used as your main course. Portions are usually smaller and less expensive. Some examples are listed below and will vary with the type of restaurant.

### **Salads and Salad Bars:**

- ❖ Salads are often part of the appetizer list. Use your allowed fruits and vegetables for these choices.
- ❖ Request that the dressing be served on the side so you can control the amount. Oil and vinegar is always a good choice for dressing. You may bring your own low-sodium dressing. Lemon or lime juice squeezed generously over the salad can replace salad dressing altogether.
- ❖ If they are not listed on the menu, ask the waiter which vegetables or fruits are in the salad. Often these are prepared individually, so you can usually make special requests. Some examples are on page 7.

Better Choices	Poor Choices
Caesar salad with chicken or shrimp	Cottage cheese, cheese fondue, other cheese dishes, anchovies
Chicken, pork or steak tostadas	Quiche, cheese sticks
Crab cakes, steamed clams, fried calamari, most shrimp dishes	Oysters
Crab Louis salad	Nachos, potato skins
Green salad with meat or fish or chef's salad without ham or cheese (request dressing on the side)	Chopped liver or pate; salted or smoked meat, fish or poultry such as ham, lox or smoked turkey; soup, bouillon or consomme.
Others: meat balls; chicken wings; pot stickers and lumpia (without dipping sauces); fried zucchini, mushrooms or onion rings.	

### Entrees:

- ❖ Portions served in restaurants may be much larger than what you eat at home. When dining out, estimate an amount close to what you normally have. Plan to take the remainder home, or split the meal with another person in your group.

**TIP:** Three ounces of cooked meat, fish or poultry is about the size of a deck of cards. Or, if you weigh meat portions at home, measure them against your hand to use as a guide when eating away from home.

- ❖ Grilled items are good choices because you can request how you want them prepared.

Better Choices	Poor Choices
Vegetable salad: lettuce, cabbage, beets, cauliflower, celery, cucumber, jicama, onions, green peas, radishes, sprouts, sweet peppers	Spinach, tomato, avocado, artichoke, kidney beans, garbanzo beans, seeds, nuts
Coleslaw	Potato salad
Beet salad	Three bean salad
Pasta salad, macaroni salad	Greek salad with olives, olive salads, relishes, pickles
Fruit cup or salad: canned fruit cocktail, canned peaches or pears, fresh or canned pineapple, mandarin oranges	Salad containing melon, oranges, bananas, kiwi, dried fruit
Gelatin salads (plain or with low-potassium fruits or vegetables added)	



Better Choices	Poor Choices
Beef (broiled or grilled steaks, burgers without cheese, prime rib roast or hot roast beef sandwiches), chicken (baked, fried, grilled or roasted), leg of lamb, lamb chops, veal, meatloaf	Mixed dishes, beef or lamb stew, liver and onions, cured or salted meats (ham, corned beef, sausage, prosciutto, chorizo)
Fish or seafood (grilled, steamed or poached)	Bouillabaisse, oysters, lobster Newburg, lox
Seafood or meat kabobs	Sauces (especially cheese or tomato), gravies
Fajitas, meat or chicken tacos (no cheese or tomatoes)	Bean dishes, chili beans, chili con carne
Omelets with allowed vegetables and sauce served on the side	Omelets with bacon, cheese, ham, sausage
Sandwiches (request no cheese): roast beef, chicken, egg, turkey, hot roast beef or turkey, fresh seafood sandwich	Submarine sandwiches, toasted cheese, BLT, bacon hamburger, Reuben, tuna (canned) salad

- ❖ Request that salt not be added when cooking.
- ❖ Request that gravies or sauces be served on the side.
- ❖ Avoid mixed dishes or casseroles, which are usually higher in sodium and phosphorus.
- ❖ Remove the skin from poultry and any crusts from fried foods to decrease sodium content.
- ❖ It is best NOT to add steak sauce, Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce or hot sauce because of the high sodium content.
- ❖ Lemon or lime juice and vinegar are good sauces and will bring out a lot of the natural flavor of foods. Black pepper will add zest to the food without making you thirsty.

## Side Dishes:

The more familiar you are with your diet, the easier it will be to choose appropriate foods. It might be wise to review your food lists before going out.

- ❖ Choose starches and vegetables that are lower in potassium, such as rice, noodles and green beans.
- ❖ Request a substitute on the menu if necessary.



Better Choices	Poor Choices
Noodles or pasta, pesto pasta, macaroni salad	Spaghetti in tomato sauce
Steamed rice, rice pilaf, rice with peas	Yams, sweet potatoes, fried rice, white potatoes
Unsalted breadsticks, bread or rolls	Baked or barbecued beans, refried beans (refrijoles)
Lower-potassium vegetables like asparagus, cabbage, cooked carrots, corn, eggplant, green peas, zucchini, corn-on-the-cob, coleslaw, lettuce salad	Higher-potassium vegetables like tomatoes, spinach, collard greens, artichokes, acorn, squash, etc.
	High sodium vegetables like sauerkraut, pickled vegetables

❖ Ask that sauces be omitted or served on the side.

**TIP:** To increase your choices, avoid higher-potassium fruits and vegetables during the day before eating out.

Better Choices	Poor Choices
Angel food, apple, lemon, pound, spice, white or yellow cake may be topped with whipped cream and low potassium fruit	Cakes rich in chocolate, coconut, dried fruit or nuts, such as carrot, chocolate mousse, devil's food, fruit or German chocolate cake
Sugar cookies, Lorna Doones, vanilla wafers, lemon creme and butter cookies	Brownies, chocolate, coconut macaroons, snickerdoodles
Fruit ice, sherbet, sorbet	Ice cream or frozen yogurt
Lower-potassium fruit desserts like berries, strawberry shortcake, gelatin desserts	Fruits higher in potassium like bananas, oranges or kiwi
Pies, tarts or cobblers made with apple, blueberry, cherry, lemon meringue or strawberry	Pies like banana cream, chocolate cream, coconut, minced meat, pecan, pumpkin, sweet potato or cheesecake

### Desserts:

- ❖ Ask for a clear description of the dessert. Choose from those desserts that have simple preparations to avoid "hidden" phosphorus and potassium.
- ❖ Choices with chocolate, cream cheese, ice cream or nuts will be much higher in potassium and phosphorus. Avoid these, share with a friend, or just eat a small amount.

- ❖ Remember, desserts such as fruit ice, gelatin, sorbet and sherbet add to your fluid intake for the day.
- ❖ Sweets may or may not be desirable for you. Always follow the advice of your dietitian, who is more familiar with your individual needs.

**Remember to take your phosphate binder (also called a phosphorus binder) with your meal. Be sure to carry it with you and keep some in the car so it is always easily available.**



## Specialized or ethnic restaurants

An enjoyable aspect of eating out is trying different ethnic and regional foods. Follow these suggestions for making wise choices.

**CHINESE** Caution: May be very high in sodium.

- ❖ Request no MSG (monosodium glutamate), soy or fish sauce in food preparation. (The menu may include this information.)
- ❖ Avoid restaurants that cook in “bulk;” look for those that prepare foods individually. You may call in advance to get this information.
- ❖ Avoid adding soy sauce to the food after it is served. Most Chinese restaurants will provide a hot pepper oil. This can be added to make the food spicier, if desired.
- ❖ Soups served with the meal are usually high in sodium and may add undesired fluid weight.
- ❖ Choose lower-potassium vegetables such as snow peas, string beans, water chestnuts, bean sprouts and bok choy. Request stir-fried vegetables that are not served in heavy sauces.
- ❖ Steamed rice is more authentic and has less sodium than fried rice.
- ❖ The tea is often served in a pot on the table. Control the amount poured into your cup to help control your fluid weight gain.
- ❖ Enjoy your fortune cookie knowing you have made the best choices.

**FRENCH** Caution: May be very high in phosphorus.

- ❖ French restaurants usually use fresh ingredients, but cream and butter may be added in large amounts.
- ❖ Try to avoid those foods prepared in cheese or cream sauces. Careful questioning of the waiter can help you make your decision.
- ❖ Choose low-potassium fruits and vegetables, and avoid the high-potassium fried potatoes or *pomme frites*.

- ❖ French bread is a good choice, low in sodium, potassium and phosphorus. The butter served is usually “sweet” or unsalted.
- ❖ Select a simple, light vinaigrette for salad dressing.
- ❖ Desserts are always a highlight. Look for delicious sorbets (count as fluid), cakes, meringues or fruits, such as plums, berries or cherries, that are not in heavy cream sauces or thickly covered with chocolate.

### **MEXICAN** Caution: May be very high in potassium.

- ❖ Put aside the chips and salsa that might be at the table when you first sit down. Save the sodium and potassium for your meal.
- ❖ Order à la carte, or select entrees that are not served with beans and Spanish rice. Some good items are tacos, tostadas and fajitas.
- ❖ Beware of the salsas used. Salsa verde is a green sauce but is made of tomatoes. Salsas made of chili peppers without tomatoes added are the best choices. Remember, guacamole is made from avocados, which are very high in potassium.
- ❖ Tortillas are good bread substitutes. Enjoy them!
- ❖ For dessert, try the flan as a dairy substitute or any of the fantastic variety of pastries, which are a good choice because they are low in potassium and phosphorus. Pastries are high in saturated fat, however, so make sure to eat them in moderate portions.

### **ASIAN INDIAN** Caution: May be very high in phosphorus.

- ❖ Indian meals are often vegetarian. While it is best to avoid the bean dishes, there are many other delicious foods to choose from.
- ❖ Enjoy experimenting with different flavors. Masala, tandoori and curry preparations are widely available on menus with both chicken and vegetable entrees.
- ❖ Remember to ask which vegetables are included in dishes, and make low-potassium choices. Ask your dietitian for a list of low-

potassium vegetables and vegetables to limit. (See National Kidney Foundation's fact sheet *Potassium and Renal Diet*.)

- ❖ Yogurt is often served as a side dish or part of side dishes, but remember it is a dairy food and high in phosphorus.
- ❖ A large selection of Indian breads, such as fried, baked or roasted varieties, are served with most meals, or are available as separate orders.
- ❖ Most desserts contain milk or milk powder in the recipe and will be high in phosphorus. Remember to take your phosphate binder.

**ITALIAN** Caution: May be very high in potassium.

- ❖ Beware of the antipasto appetizer that contains salty sausages and pickled or marinated vegetables. These foods could get your meal off to a salty, high-fat start. Also, pass on the minestrone soup, which is high in salt and potassium.



- ❖ Request an oil-and-vinegar dressing for the salad.
- ❖ Italian bread is a good bread choice. Dipping the bread in olive oil is a healthy alternative to spreading it with butter because olive oil contains heart healthy fats compared to the high animal fats in butter.
- ❖ Tomato sauces are poor choices. But pastas are served with many sauces that are not tomato-based. If you do select one with tomato sauce, request that it be served on the side. Limit cheese and white sauces.

- ❖ If you choose pizza, look for a light or vegetarian topping, and request that the tomato sauce and cheese be used lightly. It is best to avoid pepperoni or sausage pizzas, which are high in sodium. Other available toppings may include chicken or fish, both good choices.
- ❖ One tablespoon of shredded Parmesan or Romano cheese may be used for flavor. Pepper flakes may be used liberally.
- ❖ Italian ices are good dessert choices, but remember to count them as fluid.

**JAPANESE** Caution: May be very high in sodium.

- ❖ Avoid the salty soups, like miso, served at the beginning of the meal.
- ❖ Request no MSG (monosodium glutamate) and avoid the soy sauce.
- ❖ Sushi can be a good choice as portions are small. Avoid raw fish choices as they may expose you to parasitic infections. Other rolls available include cucumbers and cooked shrimp, crab or eel.
- ❖ Try the yakitori, or food grilled on skewers over a charcoal fire. Foods fried in tempura batter are good choices if not dipped in high-sodium sauces.
- ❖ Tofu, or soy bean curd, is used regularly in Japanese cooking. It is substituted for meat in the kidney diet. Be aware that it is often cooked with soy sauce for added flavor.
- ❖ The Japanese steak house offers good choices of grilled meat and vegetables, but portions may be large.
- ❖ Green tea ice cream is a popular dessert, and is a milk substitute.

**SOUL FOOD** Caution: May be high in sodium, potassium and phosphorus.

- ❖ Soul food is very challenging to the kidney diet because it is frequently high in sodium, potassium and phosphorus as well as fat.

- ❖ Salted and cured meats such as ham, sausages, bacon and salt pork should be avoided. Bacon and bacon fat are used extensively in the cooking.
- ❖ Organ meats, such as chitterlings, are higher in phosphorus than cuts of muscle meat. Limit these to occasional use.
- ❖ Dried beans and black-eyed peas are high in phosphorus and potassium. Limit these to small amounts (1-2 tablespoons).
- ❖ Cooked greens and spinach are popular. Both are high-potassium vegetables. Mustard greens are slightly lower in potassium.
- ❖ Yams and sweet potato pie are high in potassium.
- ❖ Best choices might include fried chicken (with skin removed), corn, string beans or okra, wilted lettuce, corn bread, butter and sweet potato pie (small wedge). Enjoy, and don't forget your phosphate binders.

## Fast food

Eating at fast-food restaurants is not totally out of the question. It does, however, take some thought and planning. While many fast-food items are presalted, you can ask that yours be prepared without the salt. You can also omit the high-sodium condiments such as BBQ or soy sauce and limit others, such as catsup, to one package.

Many fast-food restaurants provide nutrition information so you can check the sodium and potassium content. Your kidney dietitian can also provide this information and tell you the specific amounts of sodium and potassium allowed in your diet.

Better Choices	Poor Choices
Regular or junior-size hamburgers	Large, super- or king-size hamburgers or cheeseburgers
Roast beef or turkey sandwiches	Sandwiches with bacon, sauces or cheese
Grilled or broiled chicken sandwiches Tuna or chicken salad	Fried or breaded chicken sandwiches, chicken nuggets or strips
Unsalted onion rings	French fries, tater tots, potato chips, baked potato, potato salad, baked beans
Lettuce salads, coleslaw, macaroni salad	High-potassium foods from the salad bar or pickles; limit tomatoes
Non-cola soda, lemonade, tea and coffee, water	Milk shakes and cola sodas



Other resources of the National Kidney Foundation's Nutrition series are:

- ❖ *Phosphorus and Renal Diet*
- ❖ *Potassium and Renal Diet*
- ❖ *Sodium and Renal Diet: How to Spice Up Your Cooking*

The foundation also publishes many other brochures you may find helpful. Contact your local affiliate for more information about the materials available in the following categories:

- ❖ *About the Kidneys and Kidney Disease*
- ❖ *Early Intervention and Prevention*
- ❖ *Choosing a Treatment for Kidney Failure*
- ❖ *For the New Hemodialysis Patient*
- ❖ *For the New Peritoneal Dialysis Patient*
- ❖ *Nutrition and Kidney Disease*
- ❖ *Considering a Transplant?*
- ❖ *About Organ Donation and Transplantation*
- ❖ *Kids and Kidney Disease.*

## NOTES

*More than 20 million Americans have some form of kidney or urologic disease. Millions more are at risk. The National Kidney Foundation, a major voluntary health organization, seeks to prevent kidney and urinary tract diseases, improve the health and well-being of individuals and families affected by these diseases, and increase the availability of all organs for transplantation. Through its 51 affiliates nationwide, the foundation conducts programs in research, professional education, patient and community services, public education and organ donation. The work of the National Kidney Foundation is funded by public donations.*



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