

# **Renal Diets for Older Adults**

By Becky Dorner, RD, LD

The kidneys are amazing organs, filtering as much as 1600 liters of blood a day. The healthy kidney has many important functions including:

- maintenance of balance between fluids, electrolytes and acid base balances;
- elimination of waste products;
- regulation of blood pressure;
- maintenance of healthy bones.

But the kidneys aren't perfect, and in renal disease, once the kidneys lose approximately 75% of their function, regardless of the underlying cause, the kidneys continue to experience loss of function. Research has shown that clients with mild to moderate renal insufficiency can benefit from dietary protein restriction for the purpose of preserving the function of the kidneys.

Medical Nutritional Therapy (MNT) interventions vary according to the type of renal disease and treatment in use. Diet prescription recommendations are based on specific values for: protein, calories, phosphorus, sodium, potassium, fluid and calcium for each category. Renal diets don't have to be extremely complicated. In fact, for older adults living in long term care facilities, a more liberal approach to diet is generally recommended to encourage food intake and prevent the development of protein-energy malnutrition (PEM). (See sample modified renal diet menu).

## **Renal Dialysis**

Clients on renal dialysis may have poor appetites due to depression, GI problems and illness.

The goal of nutrition intervention is to maintain optimal nutrition status, maintain fluid balance, and reduce complications of waste products. Psychological support and encouragement can help to improve quality of life for the dialysis client. Professionals must have empathy for feelings and desires the client has for fluids, salty foods, and other things the client can no longer enjoy due to diet restrictions. Working closely with the dialysis dietitian will assist the facility in providing the best nutritional care for each individual client.

## **Fluid Restrictions**

When a client is placed on fluid restriction, nursing and dietary work together to determine fluids each department will provide. Nursing fluids are divided into shift according to medication pass and client's daily routine. Fluid items include those that liquefy at room temperature, i.e. gelatin, ice, ice cream. It is important that all foods prepared or packaged with liquids are thoroughly drained before serving. Typical fluid items: juice, broth, cocoa, coffee, tea, creamer, milkshake, ice, soda, ice cream, gelatin, sherbet, soup, and popsicles. Custard, pudding, yogurt, watermelon, refined cereals and gravy are considered non-fluid items. Clients who have complaints of thirst or dry mouth need good mouth care. Consuming fluids in frozen form will make them last longer and may make them more satisfying.

## **Renal Diets Don't Have To Be Rocket Science**

However, it helps to utilize the services of a registered/licensed dietitian to interpret the best diet for each renal client. Thorough medical nutritional assessment, review of current health, weight status, laboratory values and communication with the dialysis center will help to assure that each client receives the most appropriate diet.

**Table 1: Sample Modified Renal Diet Menu**

| <b>Breakfast</b>  | <b>Lunch</b>  | <b>Dinner</b>  |
|---|---|--|
| 3/4 c. <b><i>Apple Juice</i></b><br>6 oz Oatmeal<br>1/4 c. Scrambled Egg<br>1 Slice <b><i>White</i></b> Toast<br>1 Tbs. Jelly<br>1 tsp. Margarine<br><b>4 oz</b> Low-Fat Milk<br>Sugar, Pepper, <b><i>No Salt</i></b><br>Beverage | 3 oz Roast Beef w/Gravy<br>1/2 c. Seasoned Rice<br>1/2 c. Seasoned Peas<br>1 c. Green Salad w/<br>1 Tbs. Salad Dressing<br>1 Slice Bread<br>1 tsp. Margarine<br>1/2 c. Ice Cream<br><b><i>No Milk</i></b><br>Sugar, Pepper, <b><i>No Salt</i></b><br>Beverage | 6 oz Cream of Tomato Soup<br>2 oz Roast Chicken<br>1/2 c. Mashed Potatoes<br>1/2 c. Buttered <b><i>Corn</i></b><br>1 Slice Bread<br>1 tsp. Margarine<br>1 Baked Apple<br><b><i>No Milk</i></b><br>Sugar, Pepper, <b><i>No Salt</i></b><br>Beverage |
| <b>P.M. Snack</b>   |   |  |
| 3/4 c. Cranberry Juice<br>2 Sq Graham Crackers  |   |  |
| <b>Fluids per physician's orders.</b>   |   |  |

***Bold/italicized*** items indicate differences from regular diet.

**Nutritional Composition of the Renal Diet:**

- 1800-2000 Calories
- 65-75 grams Protein (Varies depending on stage of disease and laboratory data. Adjust diet accordingly.)
- 225-300 grams Carbohydrate (50-60% of Calories)
- 2000-3000 mg Sodium (no salt packet on tray)
- 2000-3000 mg Potassium
- 90 mg Vitamin C (may need to be supplemented)
- 8-10 mg Iron
- 800-1300 mg Phosphorus
- Fluids as ordered by physician

Nutrients may vary day to day, but should average to above estimates.

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*Becky Dorner, RD, LD is a dynamic speaker and author providing publications, presentations and consulting services to enhance the quality of care of our nation's older adults. Visit [www.beckydorner.com](http://www.beckydorner.com) for free articles, newsletters and information on nutrition care for older adults. Or call Becky at 1-800-342-0285.*