Diet and CKD: Quick Guide for Primary Care

Practical, evidence-based messages for primary care consultations



Why does diet matter for patients with CKD?

- Diet is a key modifiable factor in slowing CKD progression
- Strong links to blood pressure, cardiovascular risk, and diabetes control
- In early CKD, people should follow a healthy balanced diet (not a restrictive "renal diet")
- Small, sustainable changes can have meaningful clinical impact

Key messages: Encourage more



- Fruits and vegetables (fresh, frozen, tinned all count; aim for 5+ every day)
- Wholegrains (e.g. oats, brown rice, wholewheat pasta, wholemeal bread)
- Plant-based meals (e.g. swap some meat and poultry for beans, lentils, chickpeas)
- Nuts and seeds (unsalted)
- Fibre-rich foods
- Home-cooked / minimally processed meals (where possible)





Key messages: Limit or reduce



- Processed foods (e.g. ready meals, pastries, crisps, cakes, fizzy drinks)
- Salt (especially hidden sources in processed foods)
- Food and drinks high in fat and / or sugar
- Red meats and processed meats





MYTHS



- "Avoid bananas and tomatoes - a low potassium diet is best"
- "A strict renal diet is best for CKD"
- "Supplements can help CKD"
- "High protein and ketogenic diets are good for CKD"
- "Drinking excessive amounts of water can protect the kidneys"

MYTHS VS FACTS

FACTS

- DON'T restrict potassium unless advised by specialist renal doctor or dietitian. In early CKD, potassium is GOOD for the kidneys.
- In early CKD, focus on a healthy diet, reducing processed foods and eating a more plant-rich diet high in fruit, vegetables, pulses, nuts, seeds and wholegrains.
- Supplements (except vit D) and herbal remedies are often unnecessary or harmful.
- Avoid high-protein, ketogenic diets and protein supplements as they can strain the kidneys and worsen CKD.
- For most adults, drinking around 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid each day is appropriate.

Key takeaways

- Patients want to understand how a healthier diet can improve their CKD, rather than simply being told to "eat healthily." Making dietary advice personally relevant to their existing chronic conditions, such as diabetes or hypertension, can help increase motivation and engagement.
- Focus on overall dietary pattern, not single nutrients.
- Prioritise realistic, patient-led changes.



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Having Better Diet Conversations in 10 Minutes

Use this structure and these prompts when time is limited

1. **What *matters most*?**
   - "What's most important to you about your health right now?"
   - "What would you most like to improve?"
2. **Identify the *barrier***
   - "What feels hardest about your diet at the moment?"
   - "What does a typical day of eating look like?"
3. **Agree *one small* change**
   - "What's one thing you feel able to change this week?"
   - Keep it specific, realistic, and relevant



Bite-sized advice for 30-60 seconds in clinic

If you only have time for one message, choose one of these:

- **"Eat more fruits and vegetables"** → Aim for 5+ portions each day (more is better)
- **"Cut down salt"** → key for blood pressure control and slowing CKD
- **"Reduce processed foods"** → these are a major source of salt & additives
- **"Switch to wholegrains"** → this supports heart health & improves fibre intake
- **"Consider plant-rich eating"** → go meat free one day a week

Real-world case example

Patient:
Female aged 50, with BMI of 32. High BP, but no diabetes. Limited mobility post-stroke. Works in a call centre.

Identified habit: Daily Greggs breakfast on way to work (bacon & cheese pastry + sugary coffee).

Intervention (after brief conversation):
Swap to instant porridge pots. This is still convenient (just add hot water) but lower in salt and saturated fat and higher in fibre.

Key learning:
The issue wasn't "poor diet knowledge" but habit and convenience. A single targeted swap can be more effective than broad advice.

Key takeaways

- You don't need a long consultation to make a difference
- One meaningful conversation + one achievable change = impact
- Dietary advice should feel doable, not overwhelming



Produced Sept 2026 by Annemarie Aburrow, Specialist Dietitian, on behalf of Hampshire and Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust. Email: annemarie.aburrow@nhs.net