

News from CureGN

May 2021



Where is the Protein?

Judy Lester, MS, RDN, CSG, LDN

For people living with chronic kidney disease (CKD), it can be hard to know how much protein you should eat each day, especially when you are getting mixed messages from social media, doctors and other health care professionals. Protein is an important part of your diet and is needed to help your body turn food into energy, wound healing, building and maintaining muscle strength, and keeping your energy levels up.

Eating too much protein can be unsafe for some people with CKD, but not eating enough protein can be harmful, too.

What is the right amount of protein?

Many years ago, doctors determined that eating a low protein diet helped to slow the progression of kidney disease, and most people with CKD have been told to be on a low protein diet. But over time doctors have noticed some people with CKD have removed too much protein and may be malnourished (not getting enough nutrients) as a result. New international studies show that eating protein from a plant-based diet (whole grains, fruits, and vegetables) is of greater benefit to slow the progression of kidney disease.¹ The 2020 Kidney Disease Outcomes Quality Initiative (KDOQI) still recommends a low protein diet;¹ however, not one protein amount fits all, so it is important to talk with your doctor about what is right for you.

What are examples of protein rich foods?

Protein can be found in:

- Meats
- Eggs
- Dairy foods
- Vegetables
- Nuts
- Whole grains

With the new KDOQI guidelines, the recommendations are for a Mediterranean style diet that includes:

- Fish
- Olive oil
- Lean proteins (yogurt, skinless chicken, tofu)
- Beans
- Whole grains
- Lots of vegetables with very little red meats.²

Where can I get more diet information?

Every person with CKD should be aware of protein-containing foods and eat the right amount at each meal and snack.

You can ask your doctor for recommendations on what you can eat to help protect your kidneys and slow the progression of kidney disease.

Ask your doctor if there is a dietician you can talk with about your diet. A dietician can help you create a meal plan just right for you, and their services are often covered by insurance, so be sure to ask how you can have a “kidney-healthy” diet!

¹ Shivam J, McMackem M, Kalantar-Zahah K: Plant-based diets for kidney disease. Am J Kidney Diseases 10(3):1053, 2020.

² Ikizler TA, Burrowes JD, Byham-Gray LD et al: KDOQI clinical practice guidelines for nutrition in CKD: 2020 update. American Journal of Kidney Diseases 76(3):S1-107, 2020.