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Eating Out on a Kidney Diet

Going out to eat can be a fun social outing, a break from cooking or a necessity while away from home. Eating out at a restaurant while following your diet is a serious challenge but it can be managed with some careful planning. Many restaurants post their menus online so check out the options and don't be afraid to call ahead to ask questions. With enough notice some restaurants will even prepare something specific for you.

Plan Ahead

- Review your kidney diet before you go out or bring your food lists with you.
- Ask your dietitian about local restaurants or to help you review the menu before you go.
- If you know you will be eating out, cut back on serving sizes early in the day and avoid any salty or high potassium foods.
- If you are on a fluid restriction you may wish to save your fluids throughout the day to allow more when you are eating out.
- If you are on phosphate binders remember to bring them with you and take them with your meal.

Read the menu carefully

- Ask questions about any menu items you are not sure of. Servers are used to being asked questions about the menu.
- If you're not comfortable asking in front of your dinner companions – call ahead or check out the menu online! Many restaurants have nutritional information available.

Special Requests

- Many restaurants will be only too happy to make substitutions (ie. rice instead of potatoes) or serve salad dressings, sauces and gravies on the side so you can control the amount you eat.
- Ask if your entrée can be cooked without extra or added salt. Explain that you are on a special diet to make sure that they understand that your request is important. Calling ahead can make this even easier.

Keep in mind that anything you eat in a restaurant will be saltier than what you have at home – remember moderation is the key.



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Menu Choices

Appetizers and Salads

- Try sharing with a friend.
- Look for fresh, simple items to avoid a heavy salt or fluid load.
- Ask which fruits and vegetables are in the salad if the menu does not specify.
- Avoid salads with bacon, ham, nuts or croutons.
- Ask for oil and vinegar salad dressing to avoid the extra salt in prepared dressings.
- Better Choices: Green salad, crab cakes, shrimp cocktail, garlic bread without cheese, fried zucchini or onion rings.

Entrees

- Watch your portion sizes – try to estimate how much you normally would eat at home. Ask for a container to take the extra home.
- Avoid mixed dishes or casseroles which are often higher in salt and phosphorus.
- Avoid cream sauces, gravies and soy sauce.
- Remove the skin from poultry to help decrease the salt content.
- Season foods with fresh ground pepper, lemon or lime juice to add flavour instead of salt.
- Better Choices: grilled or broiled steaks, lamb chops, prime rib, hamburger without cheese, fajitas, chicken (fried, grilled or roasted), sandwiches

Side Dishes

- Choose starches and vegetables that are lower in potassium if you are on a potassium restriction.
- Save your fruit and vegetable choices during the day to give you more options when you are eating out.
- Ask for a substitute if necessary.
- Better Choices: rice, noodles, green beans, mixed vegetables.

Desserts

- Ask for a clear description of the dessert.
- Avoid desserts made with chocolate, cream cheese, ice cream or nuts which will be higher in potassium and phosphorus.
- Low potassium fruits make a good dessert choice especially if you have diabetes.
- Share with a friend to avoid the temptation of finishing the dessert.
- Better Choices: low potassium fruit, fruit ice, sorbet, apple, blueberry, lemon meringue pies, strawberry shortcake.



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Beverages

- If you require a fluid restriction ask for a small glass and “nurse your drink” even if it’s water.
- Decline drink refills so that you can monitor your fluid intake.
- Avoid beer, colas, tomato or tomato/clam juice.
- Choose clear pops, sparkling water, and juices found on your meal plan.

When eating out make sure to take your time, savour your meal and enjoy the company you’re with! If eating out is a necessity rather than a pleasure, make sure to plan ahead and play it safe.