A special diet is needed for people on dialysis to help prevent the build up of waste products in the blood between treatments. Following a regular diet may cause these waste products to build up to dangerous levels. You need to understand and limit protein, sodium, potassium, phosphorus, and fluids.

**Protein**

The body uses protein to help tissues grow and repair. Blood urea nitrogen (BUN) is the waste product produced from the protein we eat. When the kidneys do not work properly, urea builds up in the blood and can cause nausea, vomiting, and weakness. Dialysis treatments remove BUN to help prevent these symptoms, but can remove other proteins our bodies need.

If there is not enough protein in your diet, it can lead to muscle breakdown. The dietitian will set your protein needs based on your body weight, height, and method of dialysis. Foods highest in protein are eggs, meat, poultry, fish, milk, cheese, yogurt, soy milk, and tofu.

**Sodium**

Sodium is a mineral that is found naturally in almost all foods. Most people eat much more sodium than the body needs. Healthy kidneys will help the extra sodium leave the body in the urine. When the kidneys are not working normally, sodium builds up in the body and may cause high blood pressure, thirst, and fluid build up. The greatest source of sodium in the diet comes from using table salt (sodium chloride). Avoid processed foods because they are high in sodium. Most unprocessed foods are naturally low in sodium and are best for a dialysis diet.

**Potassium**

Potassium is a mineral the body needs to help the nerves and muscles work properly and to regulate the heart beat. Healthy kidneys help the body get rid of extra potassium. While your body still needs some potassium, it should be limited because too much potassium can cause the heart to stop or to beat irregularly (heart beat pattern is not normal). Potassium is found naturally in almost all foods. Fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and dried beans, like kidney or pinto, are the greatest sources of potassium. Many salt substitutes have potassium, and should NOT be used. Other seasonings that contain only herbs and spices are better to use.
Phosphorus

Phosphorus is another mineral the body needs to keep bones and teeth strong, but too much in the blood can have the opposite effect. When the kidneys do not work normally, phosphorus can build up in the blood and cause bones to weaken. This can be prevented by limiting phosphorus in your diet. You can also take phosphorus binding medicines prescribed by your doctor. Eat the right amount of protein without getting too much phosphorus. Your dietitian can help you determine how much phosphorus is right for you.