



CARIBBEAN KIDNEY-FRIENDLY DIET FOOD AND NUTRITION GUIDE

Learn how to enjoy traditional Caribbean foods while protecting your kidneys.

Caribbean Food, Family, and Kidney Health

Caribbean food is more than a meal. It's family, tradition, and comfort. You do not have to give that up when living with kidney disease. Small changes, like using less salt, choosing smaller portions, and picking lower-potassium fruits and vegetables, can help you enjoy the flavors you love while protecting your kidneys.

Staying at a Healthy Weight

Your body needs enough food to stay strong. Eating too little can leave you tired or cause you to lose muscle. If you're cutting back on certain foods for kidney health, your kidney dietitian can help you make sure your meals still give you the energy you need.

- Add healthy fats like a small amount of avocado if allowed
- Choose higher-calorie Caribbean staples in the right portions (rice, dumplings, cassava)
- Eat regular meals even when you don't feel hungry

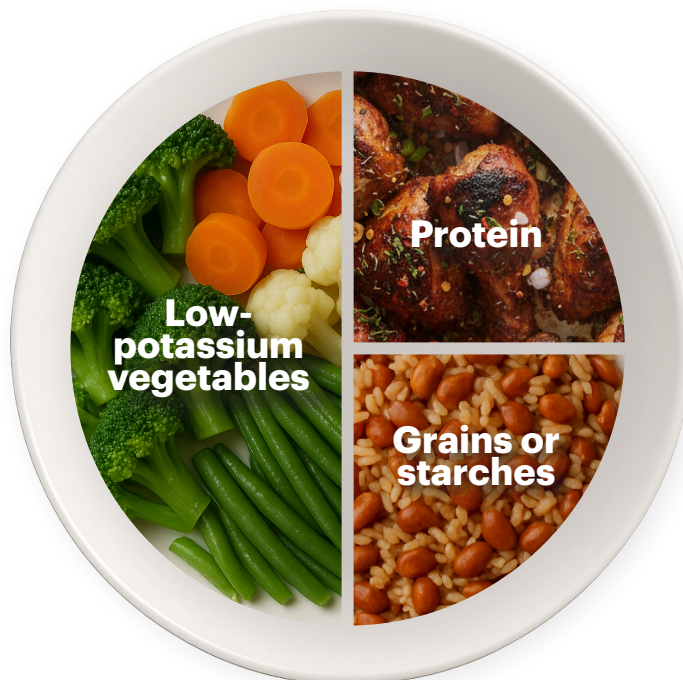
Diabetes and Kidney Disease

Balancing diabetes and kidney disease can be challenging, especially with traditional foods. Try to build meals with vegetables, lean protein, and

smaller portions of starches. For example, grilled fish with chayote salad and a small serving of rice can fit both meal plans.

Keep an eye on your blood sugar. Some fruits that are high in potassium, like plantains or ripe bananas, can also raise your potassium level. Your dietitian can help you choose fruits and portions that work for both conditions.

Caribbean Kidney Plate



Caribbean Food Swaps

TRADITIONAL DISH	KIDNEY CONCERN	SWAP	WHY IT HELPS
Ackee & saltfish	High sodium	Fresh white fish or less-salted cod	Reduces salt intake
Pelau	High phosphorus & sodium	Brown rice + skinless chicken	Lower sodium, higher fiber
Fried plantains	High potassium & fat	Baked or air-fried plantains	Less oil, smaller potassium load
Coconut rice pudding	High phosphorus	Coconut-flavored milk substitute	Same flavor, lower phosphorus
Jerk chicken	High sodium	No-salt jerk seasoning	Flavor without excess salt

TIP:**Celebrations and Festivals**

If the menu is set, start with a small portion and add vegetables or fruit to help balance your plate.

- Use fresh herbs and citrus instead of salt
- Keep portions of high-potassium foods smaller
- Add lighter sides like steamed vegetables or fruit
- Choose water or herbal tea instead of sugary drinks

How Food Choices Affect Your Kidneys

Some nutrients build up when kidneys don't work well. Watching sodium, potassium, phosphorus, protein, and fluids helps you stay balanced while enjoying Caribbean foods.

Key Nutrients to Know**SODIUM**

Too much sodium can raise blood pressure and cause fluid buildup. Caribbean foods are full of natural flavor, but salted meats and packaged seasonings add extra sodium. Lowering sodium reduces thirst and protects your kidneys.

Goal: Less than 2,300 mg per day
(or 1,500–2,000 mg if advised)

POTASSIUM

Potassium is a mineral that helps your muscles and nerves work properly. When your kidneys are not removing potassium well, levels can build up in the blood and cause irregular heartbeat or heart attack.

Many Caribbean fruits and vegetables are naturally high in potassium, so it's important to watch portions and cooking methods. Managing potassium helps keep your heart healthy and your body in balance.

Goal: About 2,000 mg per day if limiting

High: plantains, breadfruit, avocado, yam, coconut

Lower: pineapple, watermelon, chayote, okra

PHOSPHORUS

Phosphorus helps keep bones and teeth strong. When kidneys are not working well, phosphorus can build up in your blood and pull calcium from your bones, making them weak. It's found in meats, dairy, colas, and processed foods.

Goal: About 800–1,000 mg per day if limiting

High: cheese flan, pelau, coconut rice pudding, soda

TIP:

Choose fresh foods and check for "phos" on labels.

PROTEIN

Protein helps build muscles, repair tissue, and fight infection. It is found in many favorite Caribbean foods such as fish, chicken, beans, and peas. The amount and type of protein you need depends on your stage of kidney disease. Eating smaller portions or choosing more plant-based proteins can help protect your kidneys in the early stages, while those on dialysis often need more protein to stay strong and healthy.

Use your palm (3 ounces) to estimate.

- Stages 1–3: 0.6–0.8 g/kg per day
- Stage 4: 0.6–0.8 g/kg per day
- Dialysis: 1.0–1.2 g/kg per day

FLUIDS

Fluids include drinks and foods that are liquid at room temperature, such as soups, juices, gelatin, and ice cream. The amount of fluid your body needs depends on your stage of kidney disease and type of treatment. Too much fluid can cause swelling, high blood pressure, and shortness of breath, while too little can lead to dehydration and low blood pressure.

Early CKD: You can usually drink as you normally would, follow your thirst.

Dialysis: Often 32–48 oz per day (about 4–6 cups)

For more information, contact the National Kidney Foundation

Toll-free help line: **855.NKF.CARES** or email: nkfcare@kidney.org

The National Kidney Foundation wishes to thank its Council on Renal Nutrition (CRN) for the development of this fact sheet.