



Kidney Q&A

4-12 months

Life Options Rehabilitation Program

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www.lifeoptions.org

Is it OK to skip meals when dialysis makes me very tired?

Q: Is it OK to skip meals when dialysis makes me very tired?

A: Feeling tired or washed out after a treatment is a side effect of hemodialysis for some people. The problem may be worse if you gain too much fluid weight, or if too much fluid is removed at a treatment. While we all skip a meal now and then, try not to make it a habit. Eating well is key to good nutrition and your long-term health.

You need protein. Dialysis removes protein from your blood, so your doctor may have told you to eat more protein. Getting enough protein and other nutrients helps you keep up your strength and avoid infections and hospital stays.

If you have diabetes. Skipping a meal can make your blood sugar drop. Low blood sugar can make you very hungry and shaky, so you might make unwise food choices. If your blood sugar is too low, you could pass out. Be sure to check your blood sugar several times a day as directed by the doctor or nurse who takes care of your diabetes. Checking blood sugar is especially important if you can't tell when your blood sugar is low.

Easy, quick meals. If you're too tired to cook, find a food that's easy to make—even if it's a healthy frozen meal, a nutrition bar, kidney-friendly take-out, or a can of liquid supplement. Your dietitian can suggest foods or supplements you can eat if you're tired. There may be a list of acceptable frozen meals, or your dietitian can teach you how to read labels.

If you're always tired. Tell your care team if you are often too tired or washed out to eat, or if you lose your appetite. They look into the cause and offer treatment. Some reasons for feeling tired are "not enough dialysis, anemia, poor nutrition, lack of exercise, depression, restless legs syndrome, and sleep problems. Many of these can be helped with treatment.

What I can do to eat right when I'm tired:

- Tell my care team I'm too tired to eat, and ask what could be causing this.
- Track my lab results to make sure they are in the target range.
- Ask my dietitian to suggest quick, healthy foods I don't have to cook.
- Talk to my dietitian about protein foods and portion sizes so I can be sure to get enough. Ask which protein supplements or powders are safe.
- If I am diabetic, check my blood sugar and keep easy snacks on hand.
- Freeze extra meal-sized portions when I cook, for healthy "fast" food.
- Get *Just the Facts: Anemia* from the Life Options website www.lifeoptions.org/pdfs/teachingtools/vafac.pdf.

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- ❑ Read module 9 of Kidney School™: *Nutrition and Fluids* as www.kidneyschool.org to learn more about eating healthy.
- ❑ Read module 10 of Kidney School™: *Getting Adequate Dialysis* at www.kidneyschool.org to learn more about dialysis meal planning for hemodialysis or PD—with or without diabetes.