

## Nephrotic Syndrome

### What is nephrotic syndrome?

Nephrotic syndrome is not a specific kidney disease; instead, it is a general term for a condition where too much protein is lost in the urine. It can occur in any kidney disease where damage to the filtering units causes protein to leak into your urine. This can cause the protein levels in your blood to drop too low, leaving you at a greater risk of developing infections, illnesses and fluid retention.

Some of the diseases that cause nephrotic syndrome affect only the kidneys, for example, nephritis. Other diseases that cause nephrotic syndrome affect other parts of the body as well, for example, diabetes and lupus.

### Nephrotic syndrome and your diet

There are several dietary changes you may need to make to manage your disease. These are outlined below. Your Dietitian will advise you which of these apply to you (by placing a tick in the box  next to each section).

#### Protein

A diet that is moderate in protein can help to reduce the amount of protein lost in the urine and preserve your kidney function. High protein diets do not increase the levels of protein in your blood and therefore should be avoided. This includes avoiding high protein drinks, powders and supplements unless your Dietitian advises you that they are safe to include.

It is also important that you do not avoid protein, as muscle wasting and malnutrition may occur.

Good food sources of protein include:

- Meat
- Poultry
- Seafood
- Dairy products
- Nuts
- Eggs
- Legumes

Your Dietitian will advise you on the correct amount of protein to eat. As a general rule, avoid large serves of these foods.

## Fat

It is common for people who have nephrotic syndrome to have high levels of cholesterol and triglycerides (blood fats). High levels of these blood fats may increase the risk of heart disease.

It is advisable to follow a **diet low in fat**, particularly saturated (animal) fat.

Sources of saturated fat include:

- Butter
- Lard
- Full fat dairy
- Sour cream
- Pastry and biscuits
- Coconut milk
- Chicken skin and visible fat on meat

## Salt

A **low salt diet** is recommended in nephrotic syndrome to help reduce fluid retention. Avoid using salt in cooking and do not add it to food at the table. Choose foods that are low in salt. Your Dietitian will be able to give you more specific advice on foods to avoid. Avoid using salt substitutes such as 'Lite Salt'. Remember that vegie salt, herbal salt, sea salt and salt flakes are all high in salt.

## Fluid

There will be times when your Renal Doctor may advise limiting your fluid intake to help manage your nephrotic syndrome. Please ask your Dietitian if you need to do this and they will be able to give you more specific advice on how to manage this.

If you need to follow a **fluid** restriction, the following tips will help you:

- Measure the size of the cups you normally drink from
- Use a diary to record your fluid intake
- Remember to count the fluid you drink when you take tablets. Try apple puree or yoghurt instead
- Drink half cups of tea and other drinks
- If you use ice to quench thirst – this also counts in a fluid restriction
- Keep your mouth and teeth clean – this helps alleviate feelings of thirst
- If you have diabetes – keep blood sugars well controlled – if they are too high, this can also make you feel thirsty
- Chewing sugar free gum can help keep your mouth moist

## **Weight gain**

Weight gain (fluid) can occur in people who develop swelling, which is mainly the result of fluid retention.

Weight gain (body fat) can also occur as a result of steroid therapy due to increased appetite. Please consult your Dietitian for advice.

## **Medications**

The main goal in treating nephrotic syndrome is to reduce or eliminate proteinuria (protein in urine).

- Almost all patients are given an angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitor or an angiotensin receptor blocker (ARB), which lowers blood pressure, prevents worsening of kidney disease and reduces the amount of protein lost in the urine.
- Water pills or diuretics help to reduce swelling in the lower legs (oedema) and collection of fluid in the abdomen (ascites), both of which can occur in people with nephrotic syndrome
- Steroids and other medications that suppress the immune system
- Cholesterol lowering medication (also called statins) to treat high blood cholesterol
- Antibiotics for infections
- Blood thinner medications, such as warfarin, to prevent blood clots

Things I can do to improve my food and drink choices:

1.

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2.

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3.

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**For further information contact your Dietitian or Nutritionist:** \_\_\_\_\_