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CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE · GENERAL GUIDE

Protecting your kidneys every day

Diet, lifestyle and medicines for people with chronic kidney disease (stages 3 to 5).

🔎 What is chronic kidney disease?

Your kidneys filter the blood and help control blood pressure, salt, potassium and bone health. In chronic kidney disease (CKD) this function has been reduced for more than 3 months. Your **eGFR** (estimated glomerular filtration rate, in your blood test) shows how well your kidneys filter. **Albuminuria** (protein in the urine) shows kidney damage: the higher it is, the higher the risk.

Stage 3a	Stage 3b	Stage 4	Stage 5
eGFR 45–59 mL/min	eGFR 30–44 mL/min	eGFR 15–29 mL/min	eGFR < 15 mL/min
Mild to moderate decrease	Moderate to severe decrease	Severe decrease	Kidney failure

✅ The most important things

- **Little salt:** less than 5 g a day (one level teaspoon), including the salt in bread and other foods.
- **More plants, fewer ultra-processed foods:** cook at home with fresh ingredients.
- **The right amount of protein:** about 0.8 g per kg of body weight a day — not too much, not too little.
- **Do not use anti-inflammatories** (ibuprofen, diclofenac…) without asking your doctor.
- **Controlled blood pressure and blood sugar** — the best protection for your kidneys.
- **Don't smoke and keep moving:** at least 150 minutes of activity a week.

🚦 Food traffic lights

Choose

- A variety of vegetables (boiled, stewed or sautéed in olive oil)
- Fresh seasonal fruit: apple, pear, Algarve oranges, strawberries, watermelon*
- Fresh fish: hake (pescada), sea bream (dourada), sea bass (robalo), horse mackerel (carapau), grilled sardines (without coarse salt)
- Pulses (beans, chickpeas, lentils, peas) as a source of protein*
- Olive oil for cooking and dressing
- Herbs, garlic, onion, lemon, bay leaf, coriander, oregano, sweet paprika
- Water as your main drink

In moderation

- Red meat (beef, pork, lamb): no more than 350–500 g a week
- Bread: watch the amount — it is one of the biggest sources of salt in Portugal
- Salt cod (bacalhau): only when well soaked
- Cheese: choose fresh cheese (queijo fresco) or requeijão; cured cheeses are salty and high in phosphorus
- Eggs, milk and plain yoghurt in usual portions
- Unsalted nuts: a small handful*
- Wine or beer: little or none

Avoid / rarely

- Cured and smoked meats: chouriço, presunto (cured ham), alheira, farinheira, salpicão
- Sliced ham, sausages, processed meats (salt + phosphates)
- Packet crisps, salty snacks, lupin beans (tremoços) and olives
- Stock cubes, instant soups, ready-made sauces
- Fizzy drinks, especially cola (contains phosphorus)
- Fast food and ready meals
- "Light" or low-sodium salt (contains potassium)

** If your potassium is high, you may need to limit some of these foods — follow the leaflet for your stage.*

📞 Contact your doctor if…

- Swollen legs/face or rapid weight gain
- Shortness of breath, especially lying down
- Passing much less urine than usual
- Vomiting, diarrhoea or fever that stop you drinking
- Blood pressure ≥ 180/110 mmHg, or low with dizziness
- Severe muscle weakness or palpitations

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🔄 Easy swaps

INSTEAD OF…	CHOOSE…
✗ Salt in the pan and salt cellar on the table	✓ Herbs, garlic, lemon, vinegar, sweet paprika
✗ Caldo verde with chouriço	✓ Caldo verde without chouriço, olive oil added raw
✗ Poorly soaked salt cod (bacalhau)	✓ Soak for 24–48 h, changing the water several times
✗ Ham or flamengo cheese sandwich	✓ Home-cooked chicken/fish or fresh cheese
✗ Fizzy drink with meals	✓ Water (with lemon or mint, if you like)

💊 Medicines and products: take care!

🚫 **Anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs)** — ibuprofen, diclofenac, naproxen, nimesulide…: avoid. For pain, ask your doctor (paracetamol is generally safer).

🧂 **"Light" salt / salt substitutes**: contain potassium chloride — dangerous if your potassium rises.

🩻 **Contrast dye** (CT, catheter, MRI): say you have kidney disease; if the scan is needed, don't refuse it.

💪 **Protein supplements, gym shakes**: avoid (too much protein overloads the kidneys).

🩸 **Metformin**: dose adjusted to eGFR; not to be used with eGFR < 30 mL/min.

🌿 **Herbal remedies, "detox" teas, supplements**: may harm the kidneys or interact with medicines. Only on medical advice.

🚽 **Phosphate laxatives/enemas** (including some colonoscopy preparations): avoid. **Magnesium-based** ones (milk of magnesia, antacids): not for regular use.

📏 **Doses adjusted to the kidneys**: antibiotics, diabetes medicines, anticoagulants, gabapentin, allopurinol… When you see other doctors, always take your kidney test results with you.

🤒 **Sick days** (vomiting, diarrhoea, fever): contact your doctor — you may need to pause metformin, "-gliflozins", "-prils", "-sartans", diuretics.

🦴 **Vitamins and minerals** (calcium, vitamin D, potassium, magnesium): only on medical advice.

🏃 Lifestyle

🚭 Smoking
One of the most effective measures. Ask for help to quit.

🍷 Alcohol
The less the better: < 100 g a week (≈ 8 small glasses of wine).

🚶 Exercise
≥ 150 min/week of moderate activity, adapted to you. Avoid long sitting.

⚖️ Weight
Aim for a healthy weight; if overweight, losing weight helps.

🩺 Blood pressure
Measure at home. Usual target: systolic 120–130 mmHg, if tolerated.

🩸 Diabetes
Individual HbA1c target (usually 6.5%–8%).

💧 Fluids
Drink according to thirst, unless told otherwise (stones, swelling, heart).

💉 Vaccines
Flu, pneumococcal, COVID-19; hepatitis B if you may need dialysis.

🧪 Tests
eGFR and albuminuria as often as your doctor advises.

🏷️ How to read food labels

- **Salt** = sodium × 2.5. Per 100 g: **more than 1.5 g of salt is high**; 0.3 g or less is low.
- Ingredients are listed by amount: if salt is near the start of the list, the product is salty.
- **Phosphates** (E338–E343, E450–E452): sliced ham, sausages, processed cheese, cola, packaged cakes — choose products without them.
- **Potassium chloride** (E508) or "light"/low-sodium salt: avoid.

References (sources of these recommendations):

1. KDIGO 2024 Clinical Practice Guideline for the Evaluation and Management of CKD. Kidney Int. 2024;105(4S):S117–S314.
2. KDIGO 2021 Clinical Practice Guideline for the Management of Blood Pressure in CKD. Kidney Int. 2021;99(3S):S1–S87.
3. KDIGO 2022 Clinical Practice Guideline for Diabetes Management in CKD. Kidney Int. 2022;102(5S):S1–S127.
4. KDIGO 2017 Clinical Practice Guideline Update for CKD–Mineral and Bone Disorder (CKD-MBD). Kidney Int Suppl. 2017;7:1–59.
5. KDIGO 2012 Clinical Practice Guideline for the Evaluation and Management of CKD (ch. 4: medication safety, phosphate-containing bowel preparations). Kidney Int Suppl. 2013;3:1–150.
6. KDOQI/NKF Clinical Practice Guideline for Nutrition in CKD: 2020 Update. Am J Kidney Dis. 2020;76(3 Suppl 1):S1–S107.
7. 2024 ESC Guidelines for the management of elevated blood pressure and hypertension. Eur Heart J. 2024;45:3912–4018.
8. ESUR Contrast Media Safety Committee Guidelines (v10) / ACR Manual on Contrast Media — as referenced by KDIGO 2024 (4.4).
9. Direção-Geral da Saúde (Portuguese Directorate-General of Health) – PNPAS: Food Wheel and salt reduction recommendations (≤ 5 g/day, WHO).

This leaflet is for information only and does not replace individual advice from your doctor or dietitian. Targets should be personalised. Do not change or stop any medicine without talking to your doctor.