



Registered Dietitians can help improve health outcomes for your patients with kidney disease

Learn how they help and how to refer your patients

As you know, people living with kidney disease must adhere to specific nutrition guidelines to prevent further damage and delay progression of kidney disease. Because the guidelines usually require a vastly different way of eating than what your patients have been accustomed to, adherence to this change is often one of their greatest challenges. While you can start a conversation with your patients about lifestyle changes, a Registered Dietitian (RD) is specifically trained to help people with kidney disease understand the impact of key nutrients, make meaningful behavioral changes and tailor eating patterns based on their individual needs.

What services do Registered Dietitians provide?

- Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT)
- In-person and telehealth visits
- Ongoing monitoring of nutrition related lab values
- Work with patients to develop and achieve lifestyle goals
- Provide alignment with the health care team

Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT)

Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) is an evidence-based approach to treating kidney disease through the application of a tailored nutrition plan. As part of MNT, a Registered Dietitian will:

- Review the patient's current eating habits, such as food patterns, cooking at home and sodium intake
- Assess the patient's lifestyle, including physical activity, stress and environmental factors
- Work with patients to ensure understanding of renal nutrition guidelines based on their stage of kidney disease, lab results and any comorbidities

What is the difference between a Registered Dietitian and a nutritionist?

A Registered Dietitian (RD) and nutritionist are not the same. Registered Dietitians are degreed and licensed professionals specifically trained in clinical nutrition and health education. In order to practice, RDs must meet requirements and credentialing standards including:

- Formal education with at least a bachelor's degree in nutrition and dietetics
- Completion of an accredited clinical dietetic internship
- Pass a national registration exam
- Participation in continuing education

The term "nutritionist" is not a protected term, which means no specific education or credentialing is required. Therefore, anyone can refer to themselves as a "nutritionist."

- Help patients to adapt and adhere to healthy eating patterns and encourage daily activity that takes their preferences into account
- Support patients in making necessary lifestyle changes and to overcome daily challenges related to eating

In-person and telehealth visits

- RDs provide in-person services
- Based on state licensure provisions, some RDs can provide telehealth

Monitor nutrition status

As part of MNT, an RD works with and monitors the patient over time. They continually assess and counsel the patient to help them manage their kidney disease through nutrition.

Most patients with kidney disease want help from a Registered Dietitian

Most patients are willing to make changes in their diet to prevent or delay the need for dialysis:

- 3 out of 4 patients agree that MNT is important to prevent progression of kidney disease
- 9 out of 10 patients believe they can make nutrition changes to reduce the risk of complications associated with kidney disease

Why should I refer my patients to a Registered Dietitian?

It benefits your patients

A comprehensive, collaborative approach helps improve your patients' health outcomes. Referral to an RD can have beneficial outcomes that often include:

- Delay in progression of kidney disease as a result of:
 - Lower hyperfiltration and proteinuria

- Preventing and treating conditions such as acidosis, hyperkalemia and hyperphosphatemia
- Reduced inflammation
- Management of other health conditions common with kidney disease such as:
 - Diabetes
 - Cardiovascular Disease/Hypertension
 - Gout
 - Kidney stones
- Help to manage nutritional status and promote a healthy weight

MNT can improve your patients' quality of life, such as:

- Help incorporate some favorite foods
- Decrease the stress often caused by worrying about adapting to renal nutrition guidelines
- Raise energy levels by managing fatigue

It benefits you as a health care provider

By referring your patients to an RD, you can focus on talking with your patients about other issues during visits. And, it can improve outcomes such as delaying the need for dialysis.

For optimal health outcomes, refer your patients who are in early-stage CKD!

How do I refer my patients to a Registered Dietitian?

To find an RD near you who specializes in kidney disease, search the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics directory at eatright.org/find-a-nutrition-expert

When you refer to an RD:

- Inform your patient that you are referring them to a dietitian
- Explain what an RD does and how they work with people who have kidney disease
- Provide the RD the patient's medical history, including results of blood and urine tests
- Determine a plan for communicating with the RD

What is the cost of Registered Dietitian services?

Medicare, Medicaid and some private insurance plans cover the cost of RD services for patients with kidney disease. For patients with CKD and an eGFR of 15 - 59 ml/min and for those 36 months post transplant, Medicare and Medicaid cover the full cost of 2 to 3 hours of MNT per year.

Learn more about Registered Dietitian services

- **Visit the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics:** eatright.org
- **Visit Kidney Kitchen Pro:** kitchen.kidneyfund.org/kidney-kitchen-pro/
- **Read the article:** Kramer et al. Medical Nutrition Therapy for Patients with Non-Dialysis-Dependent Chronic Kidney Disease: Barriers and Solutions. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2018;118(10):1958-1965. doi: 10.1016/j.jand.2018.05.023.



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