



KIDNEYS R US

FROM THE
QIRN3 PATIENT ADVISORY
COMMITTEE

March 2011

Managing Your Phosphorus

By Ellen Cottone, MS, RD
Renal Center of Trenton

If you are a dialysis patient, chances are you struggle to maintain normal phosphorus levels. You listen intently to every word your dietitian says about limiting high phosphorus foods and taking your phosphate binders regularly. You have so many lists of high phosphorus foods in your home, even your dog watches his diet. “Finally”, you may think, as your dietitian approaches to give you your monthly report card, “my phosphorus must be within the normal range”. Your heart sinks as you see the word “high” next to your phosphorus level. “What do I have to do to lower my phosphorus?!” you ask in frustration.

In answer to that question, there are three main strategies to keep your phosphorus within the normal range, 3.5 to 5.5. Following a low phosphorus diet, taking your phosphate binders every time you eat a substantial meal or snack, and coming to every dialysis treatment and staying for your full treatment time are the keys to phosphorus management. In addition to being aware of the lists of “don’ts” and “avoids” on your refrigerator, take note of the following strategies:

Keep a food diary for 3 to 5 days. Keep a note pad with you and write down everything you eat and drink each day. This will increase your awareness of “mindless eating”, or foods you may have forgotten you have eaten. Share this list with your dietitian.

Make a conscious effort to read food labels. Phosphorus is often listed on the “Nutrition Facts” label as a percentage under “% daily value”. For example, the daily value for phosphorus is 1000 mg, so 15% would

equal 150 mg. Your dietitian can tell you how much phosphorus your diet allows you daily. Phosphorus may be listed under “ingredients” in the form of phosphate. Look for words such as “disodium phosphate”, “monocalcium phosphate”, or “sodium pyrophosphate”.

If you must eat high phosphorus foods, watch your serving sizes. Instead of 1 cup of cow’s milk, measure out ½ cup. Choose one ounce of cheese (1-inch cubed), a small handful of nuts, ½ cup of oatmeal, or one slice of whole wheat bread at a time. Always take binders when you eat these foods, even as snacks.

Substitute low phosphorus for your favorite high phosphorus foods. Try soymilk, almond milk, or rice milk in place of cow’s milk. Soy or rice cheese can be substituted for regular cheese. Instead of nuts, try popcorn, unsalted crackers, or rice cakes. In place of dark soda, have seltzer water flavored with lemon or a small amount of cranberry juice.

Diet is only one component in the fight against high phosphorus. Adherence to the phosphate binder regimen your physician prescribes is essential to phosphorus management. The following suggestions may be helpful:

Take your phosphate binders every time you eat a meal or substantial snack. “Substantial” refers to snacks such as cheese and crackers, ½ sandwich with a meat or high protein food, or milk and cookies. It is not necessary to take binders with snacks such as fruit or popcorn.

If your phosphate binder is causing stomach upset, tell your physician or dietitian. He or she may be able to recommend an alternate medication that is easier on your stomach.

Always carry your binders with you in a pill case. Take your binders within 30 minutes of eating. These medications bind with phosphorus in the foods you eat. If they are taken too long before or after a meal, they will not be effective.

Adherence to your diet and binder regimen removes some, but not all of the phosphorus in your blood.

Coming to dialysis and staying for your entire treatment time are crucial to maintain normal phosphorus levels.

Finally, don't forget to reward yourself for practicing the behaviors mentioned in this article, even if your phosphorus is still high. Treat yourself to a non-food treat when you remember to take the full dose of your binders, such as relaxing and reading a good book. Rewarding yourself for positive behaviors instead of scolding yourself for slipping up will increase the likelihood that you will stay on track with managing your phosphorus.

Disaster Preparedness: Are You Ready?

The Atlantic Hurricane season officially begins on June 1 and ends on November 30. After the hurricane season has ended, the winter approaches threatening to bring ice and snow storms. The past winter of 2010 was particularly difficult for dialysis patients. Springtime brings with it not only beautiful flowers but heavy rains that can cause flooding. Natural disasters can cause a disruption in your dialysis routine. You may not be able to totally avoid a natural disaster, but you can be prepared for one! Your facility is required to review in-center emergency procedures with you annually, however, what can you do at home? Here are some tips:

Planning and Preparedness

- Make sure your dialysis clinic has your correct address, phone number and emergency contacts. Update this information whenever there is a change;
- Prepare an emergency box with food, water, medications and supplies;
- Have your doctor, dialysis clinic and hospital phone numbers written in a handy place;
- Wear a bracelet or pendant identifying yourself as a dialysis patient;

- Contact your local power company to request priority consideration in the event of a power outage;
- Develop an Emergency Diet Plan with your dietitian;
- In case you are stranded at home: have a back-up transportation provider arranged in the event your normal provider is not available;
- Stay at home unless you are hurt;
- Wait for instructions from your dialysis clinic;
- Start your Emergency Diet Plan;
- Protect your dialysis access;
- If you live alone, ask a neighbor, friend or family member to check on you regularly; and
- Tune in to official radio or television emergency broadcast channels.

Please contact Quality Insights Renal Network 3 at 888-877-7400 or visit our website at www.qirn3.org for additional resources.

You can also visit www.kcercoalition.com for information on disaster preparedness for the kidney community.

JOIN THE PAC TODAY!



The Patient Advisory Committee (PAC) consists of patients from dialysis facilities in our ESRD Network # 3. The committee develops the patient newsletter and promotes educational materials for ESRD patients. The PAC members have a genuine concern for the quality of care issues and encourages patients to be involved in their healthcare, share skills and experience, and attend meetings. Call toll free 1-888-877-8400 to join the PAC.

How to Contact QIRN3
 Cranbury Gates Office Park
 109 South Main Street, Suite 21
 Cranbury, NJ 08512
 Phone: 888-877-8400 (toll-free)
 Fax: 609-490-0835
 Email: qirn3@nw3.esrd.net

We're on the
 Web!
www.qirn3.org