Fluid balance on haemodialysis

Information for patients
One of the functions of your kidneys is to control the amount of water in your body; this is known as ‘fluid balance’. When kidney function decreases, getting rid of excess fluid can become a problem.

Most people who are having haemodialysis need to reduce the amount of fluids that they take in. This booklet will give you information on how to manage your fluid intake.

**Haemodialysis and you**

Haemodialysis usually takes place for about 3-5 hours, on 3 days of the week. Excess fluid which has built up between your dialysis sessions is removed during each treatment.

When you arrive at the dialysis unit, you will need to record your weight. The nurses will also tell you what your ideal target weight (or dry weight) is. Your target weight is the weight at which you are not carrying any excess fluid. Your nurse will work out how much weight (fluid) needs to be removed during your dialysis.

For example, if your target weight is 70kg and your weight is 71.5kg when you come for dialysis, the nurses will programme the dialysis machine to remove 1.5 litres of fluid. This is the amount of fluid that has built up since your last dialysis.

1 litre of fluid = 1 kg in weight

Everyone has their own individual target weight. Sudden or rapid changes in weight (between dialysis sessions) are because of fluid intake, but over time you may also lose or put on muscle or fat – this means your target weight may need to be adjusted.
Your daily fluid intake (allowance)

Your named nurse or kidney doctor will let you know how much fluid you should have every day. Everyone’s allowance is different. To work this out you will be asked to measure the amount of urine you pass in 24 hours. Your named nurse will ask you to collect your urine in a bottle for a 24 hour period; they will then measure this and let you know the amount of fluid that you can drink each day. In general, dialysis patients should drink no more than 500mls per day plus the same volume of urine you pass in 24 hours.

For example: 500mls + 250mls of urine passed in 24 hours = 750mls total fluid allowance per day

Most people on dialysis pass less urine over time. As this happens, you will need to reduce the amount of fluid you should take. We will reassess your fluid allowance every 6 months or if you are struggling to with your fluid balance.

Ideally your weight gain between each dialysis session should be no more than 1 to 2 litres (or 1-2 kg), as this will make your dialysis session much easier for you, improve your blood pressure and help to protect your heart.

If the amount of weight you put on between dialysis sessions is greater than 2kg you are probably drinking too much fluid. If you drink too much then the excess fluid will build up and you may feel unwell.
Exercise and fluid intake

You should always seek advice before starting any exercise programme, as exercise usually causes sweating and your fluid intake may need to be adjusted.

Fluid and blood pressure

When you drink too much fluid your blood pressure can increase. This is called hypertension and puts a strain on your heart.

Symptoms of excess fluid

If you have extra fluid in your body you may experience breathlessness, swelling of your ankles (oedema), feet and face. This tends to happen more in older people. If you are younger than 50 you may not have any of these signs, but your blood pressure may still be high. If you notice any of these symptoms, please tell your kidney doctor or nurse.

Fluid overload – symptoms

- headaches
- shortness of breath
- increase in blood pressure
- fluid on the lungs
- ankle and leg swelling.
How to keep within your daily fluid allowance

Your fluid allowance includes tea, coffee, cold drinks and fluid rich food, such as gravy, soup and ice-cream.

Keep a measuring jug in your kitchen. Start each day with the jug empty. Each time you have a drink or measure of fluid add the same amount of water to the measuring jug. You will then be able to see your total intake of fluid as the day goes on.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Useful fluid measures</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 teacup</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 glass</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plastic disposable cup</td>
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<tr>
<td>Can of fizzy drink</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 measure of spirits</td>
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<td>1 ice cube</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Useful conversions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 litre</td>
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<td>1 pint</td>
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<td>¾ pint</td>
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<td>1 tablespoon</td>
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<td>1 dessert spoon</td>
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Tips on managing your fluid allowance

• Avoid eating salty food as this will make you thirsty.

• When having a drink, use a smaller cup or half fill your cup or glass.

• Take small sips rather than big gulps.

• Try to drink only when you are thirsty rather than out of habit or to be sociable.

• If you drink alcohol, drink spirits with a splash of mixer instead of beer, lager or cider.

• Let your family and friends know that you can only drink a certain amount each day so that they are not tempted to give you extra fluids.

• Avoid taking drinks with meals. Save them for between meals.

• Try sucking small ice cubes (frozen squash or frozen fizzy drinks are a refreshing alternative). An average ice cube is 10-20mls so 10 ice cubes can equal a small cup.

• Try having sweets, such as mints, boiled sweets, or chewing gum instead of a drink. (Sugar free versions are just as good, or try hydrating sweets such as Aquadrops.)

• Saliva replacement sprays can help keep moisture in your mouth and can be prescribed for you.
Salt

Sodium chloride is the scientific name for table salt. Rock salt, sea salt and garlic/celery salt all contain sodium chloride. Salt is commonly used to season foods and is also used in processed foods to add flavour and act as a preservative. Salt is the most powerful factor which makes you thirsty. It is very difficult to keep to a fluid allowance unless your salt intake is low.

**Try not to have more than 6 grams of salt per day.**

We advise that you follow a ‘no added salt’ diet, but sometimes you may feel food is tasteless without salt. Once you begin to eat less salt your taste buds will adjust, although this may take a few weeks. As a replacement, you could use garlic, lemon juice, vinegar, herbs, chillies and pepper to enhance the flavour of your food.

Frequently asked questions: tips from other patients

**How do I manage my fluid balance in social situations?**

- If you know in advance that you are going to attend a social event, on the day try to save up some of your daily fluid allowance.

- Fill up your glass with ice and take small sips of fluid– that way it will make your drink last much longer.

**I take a lot of pills – will this take a lot of my daily fluid allowance?**

- To swallow pills: Put the pill in your mouth and take a sip of fluid. Tilt your head upwards and look at the ceiling. Let the pill sink to the back of your throat and then swallow.
• To swallow capsules: Put the capsule in your mouth and take a sip of fluid. Look downwards to the floor. Allow the capsule to float to the back of your throat and swallow.

• Some tablets may be taken with soft food e.g. yogurt.

Some days I drink more than others – what do I do when I feel thirsty?

• If you can keep your salt intake low this will really help you to avoid feeling thirsty.

• It may help to rinse your mouth out with water.

• Try to chew gum or suck on a boiled sweet, a slice of lemon or an ice cube.

• Use a fan to remain cool.

Some medications may make you feel thirsty. Ask your doctor or nurse if any medications you are using cause thirst as a side effect.

Key points to remember

When you start dialysis; you need to be careful about your fluid intake so that you do not become fluid overloaded.

• Signs of fluid overload include breathlessness, swelling of your ankles, face and eyes, and high blood pressure.

• Try to gain less than 1.5-2kgs between your dialysis sessions.

• Controlling your salt intake will help avoid thirst.

• Good salt and fluid balance helps to control blood pressure and will help to protect your heart.
Please seek advice from a renal dietitian if you are having difficulties with your fluid allowance.

Renal Dietitian Tel: 01865 225 061

Other useful contact numbers

Main Dialysis unit (Oxford) Tel: 01865 225 807
Tarver Unit (Oxford) Tel: 01865 225 695
Milton Keynes Unit Tel: 01908 243 280
Stoke Mandeville Unit Tel: 01296 315 000
Banbury Unit Tel: 01295 229 812
High Wycombe Unit Tel: 01494 426 352
Swindon Dialysis Unit Tel: 01793 605 286

Useful information

‘Make it Count’ – A Roche booklet from the British Renal Society’s website.

Website
If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call 01865 221 473 or email PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk

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