



Oxford University Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Managing your fluid balance

**Information for people with  
chronic kidney disease**



## **Why do I need to manage my fluid balance?**

The amount of fluid in our body is controlled by our kidneys. This prevents dehydration or fluid overload.

If your kidneys aren't working properly, you may find that you pass less urine than usual. Some people who are on dialysis pass little or no urine at all.

If you drink more fluid than you can get rid of, fluid can build up in your body. This can lead to increased blood pressure, swollen ankles and put additional strain on your heart. You will therefore need to reduce your fluid intake. Your renal doctor, dietitian or dialysis nurse will be able to advise you on this.

## **How will I know if I have too much fluid in my body?**

Common symptoms of having excess fluid are breathlessness and swelling of your ankles, face or feet. You can also experience puffy eyes. If you notice these, please tell your doctor or kidney nurse. If you are young you may not experience any of these symptoms but your blood pressure will be high.

Sudden and rapid weight changes are usually due to fluid. Slower changes can be caused by changes to your fat and muscle weight.

If you are actively trying to gain/lose weight please speak with your dietitian/kidney nurse, and they can advise your doctor that your target weight may need checking and adjusting.

The amount of urine you pass will determine how much fluid you need over the day.

## Fluid management definitions

Understanding fluid management can sometimes be confusing and you will find that people use different terms to refer to different measurements and weights. These definitions will help to explain them.

### **Dry weight / Target weight:**

Your normal weight without any extra fluid in your body.

### **Pre dialysis weight:**

If you are receiving dialysis, you will be weighed prior to treatment. From this weight, your nurse can calculate how much fluid needs to be removed.

### **Post dialysis weight:**

If you are receiving dialysis, this is weight after treatment, the aim is to get this to your target / dry weight.

We generally weigh you in kilograms (kg). 1kg is the equivalent of 1 litre.

For example, if your pre dialysis weight is 72kg and your post dialysis weight is 70kg, you have had 2 litres of fluid removed during dialysis.

Everyone has an individualised fluid allowance, which is based on your urine output and other fluid losses, temperature, how much exercise you do and your blood pressure.

## How much fluid can I drink?

If you are unsure of what your fluid allowance should be, you can speak with your renal doctor, dietitian or dialysis nurse.

### **On haemodialysis (HD)**

- You should aim for a weight gain between dialysis sessions of less than 1.5 to 2kg.
- If you usually put on more weight than this, you are probably drinking too much.
- Speak with your renal doctor or dietitian for an individualised amount.

### **On peritoneal dialysis (PD)**

- You will be monitoring your own fluid balance by measuring blood pressure and weight.
- Your peritoneal dialysis nurse can provide you with more information.

A dialysis patient's fluid allowance is generally calculated by:

#### **HD:**

500ml + previous day's urine output = daily fluid allowance

#### **PD:**

750ml + previous day's urine output = daily fluid allowance

You do not need to measure your urine output everyday. You will be provided with a 24 hour urine collection bottle to measure your output when you initially start dialysis.

Most people on dialysis pass less urine over time; if this happens you will need to have your fluid allowance reassessed and will need to reduce your fluid intake.

If you are not on dialysis, your renal doctor can advise how much you should be drinking.

If you are an inpatient on the Renal Ward, your doctor will let you know how much fluid you should have every day as this may differ from what you usually follow at home.

## Fluid in Food

Fluid rich foods need to be counted towards your fluid allowance; although it is advisable to focus on the fluids you drink rather than in what you eat if you are fluid overloaded. Count half the volume of fluid rich foods towards the fluid allowance, e.g. 120ml yoghurt would count as 60ml of your fluid allowance or a scoop of ice cream on the Renal Ward would count as 40ml. Also include any fluid you are adding to food, such as how much milk you are adding to cereal.

If you are taking any oral nutrition supplements e.g. Ensure or Fortisip, these will need to be included in your fluid allowance.

### **Counts towards your fluid restriction**

- Gravy
- Soup
- Thin Sauces
- Custard
- Jelly
- Thin Yoghurt
- Ice cream / lollies

### **Do not need to count towards your fluid restriction**

- Fruit
- Vegetables
- Salad
- Rice
- Pasta
- Couscous

## **Tips to help you keep to your daily fluid allowance**

- Use a measuring jug to help manage your allowance. Start with the jug empty and for every drink you have, add the same amount of water to the jug. You will be able to see your total intake of fluid as the day goes on.
- Alternatively if you only drink water, you can measure out your fluid allowance for the day in a measuring jug and keep it in the fridge to stay cold.
- Use a smaller cup or only fill your cup, glass or mug to halfway.
- Sip your drinks slowly rather than taking big gulps.
- Using a straw can help make your drinks last longer.
- Try to drink only when you are thirsty rather than out of habit or to be sociable.
- If you drink alcohol, have spirits with a splash of mixer instead of beer, lager or cider.
- Avoid letting anyone “top up” your drink.
- Avoid drinking with meals and save drinks for in between meals.
- Drinking cold water or sucking on ice can be more refreshing. You can use squash to flavour ice cubes.
- Using plastic ice cubes can allow your drinks to stay cool without adding extra fluid.
- Try sucking on sweets such as mints, boiled sweets or chewing gum. Sugar free versions may be a better option, particularly if you have diabetes. Having a piece of fruit can also be thirst quenching.
- Try swirling some mouthwash in your mouth.

Avoid eating salty foods or adding salt to your foods as these will make you thirsty.

For more information on salt content of foods and tips for reducing salt intake, please see our diet sheet “Reducing Salt Intake – Information for renal patients”.

## Fluid and Medications

It can feel challenging to manage a fluid allowance if you have to take a lot of medications every day. Below are some tips to help reduce the amount of fluid needed.

### **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. yoghurt. Check the instructions on your medication or speak with your doctor or pharmacist to see if this is possible.



**Useful Fluid Measures and Conversions**

1000 ml / 1 litre	approx. 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ pints
750 ml / $\frac{3}{4}$ litre	approx. 1 $\frac{1}{3}$ pint
500ml / $\frac{1}{2}$ litre	approx. $\frac{3}{4}$ pint
1100ml	2 pints
570ml	1 pint

It may be useful to measure how much fluid the glasses, cups and mugs you use at home can hold as it can vary greatly. This can help get a more accurate picture of your fluid intake.

1 average teacup	200ml
1 average glass	200ml
1 plastic cup	175ml
1 average can of fizzy drink	330ml
1 single measure of spirit	25ml
1 tablespoon	15ml
1 ice cube	10-20ml

# Contacts

## **Renal Dietitians**

Tel: **01865 225 061**

Please leave a message on the answerphone and one of the team will call you back.

## **Further information**

### **Oxford Kidney Unit**

The website has lots of information about the Oxford Kidney Unit for patients and carers.

Website: **[www.ouh.nhs.uk/oku](http://www.ouh.nhs.uk/oku)**

### **Kidney Care UK**

A charity which has lots of practical support and information for people with kidney disease.

Website: **[www.kidneycareuk.org](http://www.kidneycareuk.org)**

### **Six Counties Kidney Patients Association**

The SCKPA is run for patients by patients or family members.

They offer support to people suffering from kidney disease or who are on dialysis. They work closely with the Oxford Kidney Unit and have branches in Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire, and Milton Keynes, and parts of Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and Berkshire.

Website: **[www.sixcountieskpa.org.uk](http://www.sixcountieskpa.org.uk)**



## Further Information

If you need an interpreter or would like this information leaflet in another format, such as Easy Read, large print, Braille, audio, electronically or another language, please speak to the department where you are being seen. You will find their contact details on your appointment letter.

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