

HEALTHmatters

Going Plant-Based for Your Health: Protect Your Kidneys

by Karen Pullen



Our kidneys have one super-power mission: to detoxify the body. These two highly vascular organs filter about 200 quarts of our blood every day.

They remove toxins, waste, and excess fluid, then excrete it out as urine.

KIDNEY DISEASE Because they are packed with blood vessels, kidneys are susceptible to the same diseases as the heart. High blood pressure, high cholesterol and inflammation all insult the filtering units of the kidneys, causing the delicate blood vessels to become clogged and injured. When fluid and waste products remain trapped in the body, the resulting chemical imbalance makes people very sick. They have kidney disease.

Scary Statistics Nearly 14 percent of the U.S. population suffers from chronic kidney disease, including one in three Americans over the age of 64 (though three-fourths might not know it; deteriorating kidneys don't show symptoms). When the kidneys fail completely, dialysis is the only therapy, and Medicare funds it for all Americans. In 2017, Medicare spent \$120 billion on beneficiaries with chronic kidney disease or failure; still, more than 50,000 of those patients died. Despite available therapy, kidney disease kills more people than breast or prostate cancer.

ROLE OF DIET The Western-style diet is a major risk factor for impaired kidney function and chronic kidney disease, causing an impairment of kidney blood flow, inflammation, leakage of protein into the urine, and a rapid decrease in kidney function.

Animal foods are not your kidneys' friends. Meat, eggs, and dairy slowly but surely damage both the heart and kidneys, leading America to its present kidney disease crisis.

The most serious harm to kidneys of a diet high in animal protein is done by increased inflammation, acid levels, and uremic toxins in the body. These increase the kidney's workload. Sustained excesses of animal protein call on our kidney reserves continuously, causing a kind of unrelenting

stress that can predispose even healthy people to progressive kidney scarring and deterioration of kidney function.

On the other hand, eating vegetable protein does not appear to have the same effects. Why does animal protein cause that overload reaction, but not plant protein? It appears to be an inflammatory response triggered by the animal protein. The kidneys handle plant protein differently, with much less stress.

PREVENT EXCESS PHOSPHORUS INTAKE Too much phosphorus appears to damage kidney blood vessels and accelerate aging and bone loss. The worst type is found in phosphate food additives, added to many drinks, meat, and a variety of other food and beverage products. Nearly all chicken products contain phosphate additives. Another reason (there are so many, the subject of another column) to avoid eating chicken.

PLANTS TO THE RESCUE The good news is that most kidney disease can be prevented, slowed, or reversed with a change of diet.

Many studies found that people who consumed the most fiber (i.e., plant foods) had significantly lower markers of inflammation, improved blood lipids, and improved antioxidant status. The less protein we eat, particularly animal protein, the lower the workload on our kidneys. In patients with more advanced kidney disease, vegan diets have shown promise in slowing down the disease process and keeping the cardiovascular system healthy.

If you already have kidney disease, be encouraged! Taking control of your lifestyle will empower you to slow and reverse the disease. Avoid animal protein, eat plants, drink plenty of water. Foods that support kidney health include citrus, avocados, beans, apricots, leafy greens, grapes, and berries.

Here's a convenient plant-based recipe that comes together in minutes. It makes the perfect potluck contribution or lunch all week. It's one of three recipes I prepare in Class 3 of the Kickstart Your Health series, which I plan to teach at CCCC. Check class offerings for May, June and the fall.

ORZO with TOMATOES, BASIL, PEAS, and PINE NUTS

- 8 ounces orzo, white or whole wheat
- 1 ½ cups cherry tomatoes, sliced in half
- 1 cup green peas
- ½ cup basil, minced
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 2 Tbs pine nuts, toasted
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 tsp. Dijon mustard

Set a large stock pot over medium heat. Sauté the onions, garlic and celery for 3-5 minutes. Add a bit of vegetable broth if they begin to stick. Stir in the turmeric, paprika, and cayenne, and cook a minute or two longer. Add in the remaining vegetables, beans, liquids, and bay leaf. Give it a good stir and bring to a simmer for 20 minutes. Mix in the nutritional yeast and simmer for 10 more minutes. Remove from heat and puree soup using an immersion blender. Salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with fresh chopped chives.

Karen Pullen is a mystery writer and the former owner of a vegetarian B&B. She is an instructor of Food for Life courses in healthy eating, certified in plant-based nutrition and plant-based cooking. Discover new dishes at her monthly cooking classes. Learn more at her website, www.everydayplant-based.com

CAARE Helps Chatham's Creatives

While some are fighting for their lives due to COVID-19, others are struggling for their livelihoods. Small businesses, nonprofits, and restaurants have all been financially impacted by the virus. Artists have especially been hit hard. That's why the Chatham Arts Council is announcing the creation of CAARE, the Chatham Artist and Arts-Workers Relief Effort.

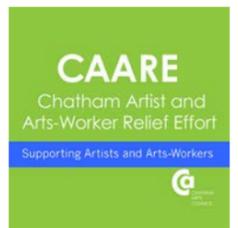
CAARE was created with initial seed money generously granted by Manbites Dog Theater Fund. The goal is to get immediate assistance to Chatham County artists and arts-workers struggling with the economic impacts of the pandemic. Basic financial needs for artists and arts-workers—people who make their living in the arts by making artist events possible, including gallery owners, artist managers, stage managers, arts

nonprofit administrators, etc.—who are dealing with widespread cancellations of concerts, plays, events, and art shows—the outlets that musicians, actors, dancers, painters, sculptors, and teaching artists rely on to pay their bills.

Funds are awarded weekly on a first-come, first-served basis with specific consideration to application requirements and available funding.

Most grants will be in the \$50 to \$250 range. The funding amounts provided are based on incoming donations, balanced with the number of requests received.

For more information, visit www.ChathamArtsCouncil.org



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own daily experience can suggest ideas to explore. Conversely, if you notice that a trendy item that was so hot last year now seems to be showing up more often in clearance bins than shoppers' carts, you might want to see whether the stock is a candidate for sale.

STEP UP YOUR GAME

If you're afraid to make decisions because you don't know a mutual fund from an exchange-traded fund:

- Get some basic information. Your retirement plan at work might provide educational materials or assistance, and there are plenty of books, magazines, and websites that can help. Don't be afraid to talk to friends who may have similar questions, but do your own research, too.
- Take baby steps and learn as you go. You don't have to do everything at once; even a small step is better than none.
- Don't postpone getting started; the longer you wait, the fewer options you may have. Even if you don't make your own financial decisions now, the odds are good that you may someday have to do so.
- Recognize that you're not alone. Others may have the same doubts as you about their investing abilities.

If you've already started working toward your goals but aren't sure you're on the right track:

- Clarify your investing goals, your time horizon, and your level of risk tolerance and make sure you're properly diversified. If you're not sure how your money is invested, get whatever help you need to develop an asset allocation strategy that's appropriate for your goals and risk tolerance.
- Make sure your expectations for a return on your money are both realistic and sufficient to give you the best chance of achieving your goals. Don't focus solely on risk, but also on potential reward and ways to try to manage risk. And remember that an investment's past performance is no guarantee of its future results.
- Some investments offer potential growth, some focus on protection of your initial investment, and some provide regular income payments. Understand what you own and what role each investment fills in your portfolio. Though asset allocation and diversification can't guarantee a profit or eliminate potential loss, they can

help you manage the types and levels of risk you take.

- An investment club can be a way to explore investing in a social setting. The National Association of Investors Corporation can help you start or find one.

IF YOU'RE MONEY SAVVY:

- To ensure that you're making the most of your money, benchmark the performance of your investments and your portfolio as a whole against a relevant index or model portfolio.
- Make sure your asset allocation adjusts to changes in your life circumstances.
- Don't underestimate the impact of taxes, fees, expenses, and trading costs on portfolio performance. If you've amassed substantial assets, you might benefit from expert help in dealing with issues such as taxes, estate planning, and asset protection.
- Have a game plan to keep yourself from panicking during volatile markets.

Equipping yourself to pursue your financial goals is time well invested.

NOTE: Before investing in a mutual fund or exchange-traded fund, carefully consider its investment objective, risks, fees, and expenses, which can be found in the prospectus available from the fund. Read it carefully before investing.

IMPORTANT DISCLOSURES

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