Facts on Phosphorus

What is Phosphorus?

- Phosphorus is also known as phosphate.
- Phosphorus is a mineral that works with calcium to form strong bones and teeth.
- Healthy kidneys can remove extra phosphorus from the body but for dialysis patients or for patients close to receiving dialysis, phosphorus may build up in the blood.

A high level of phosphorus in the blood may cause:

- Itchy skin
- Calcium and phosphorus to form crystals in the skin, blood vessels, heart, lungs, brain and eyes leading to joint pain, hardening of the arteries and damage to the heart and other organs
- Poor blood circulation
- Bone pain and weakness
- Skin sores

Where is phosphorus found in the diet?

It is found naturally in dairy products, nuts and seeds, fresh meats, high fibre foods (like whole grains), beans and lentils.

Phosphorus can also be added to foods in the form of “phosphate additives”. Manufacturers are not required to list the amount of phosphorus in their products or to list it on the nutrition facts table. However, it is required to be listed in the ingredient list.

Read the ingredient list to check if phosphate additives have been added to foods and avoid eating these foods when possible. Look for ingredients containing “phos” as part of a word (e.g. phosphoric acid). These additives are absorbed more easily than naturally occurring phosphorus.

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Examples of foods/drinks that commonly contain added phosphorus:

- Processed/convenience foods, instant products (Kraft Dinner®, muffin mixes, scalloped potatoes)
- Cheese whiz®, individual cheese slices
- Ready to eat frozen foods (hot dogs, chicken fingers, bacon, pizza)
- Colas (Coke®/Pepsi®, Dr. Pepper®), iced tea and beer
- Fast foods/Restaurant foods

If your phosphorus is high, your renal dietitian will help you to lower your phosphorus intake.

Tips to decrease phosphorus:

- Eat a diet lower in phosphorus, using some of the tips below
  - Limit or avoid high fibre cereals and breads
  - Use milk substitutes such as Rice Dream Original® and almond or cashew beverages to substitute for cow’s milk if you like to drink more than ½ cup of milk per day.
  - Limit your intake of dairy to a 1/2 cup serving per day. This includes milk, yogurt, cream soups, ice cream, and milk-based puddings
  - Limit your intake of processed foods and fast foods as they contain high amounts of phosphate additives
  - Limit cheese to a small brick slice (1 oz. serving) 3 times per week
  - Limit chocolate (chocolate bars, chocolate milk, hot chocolate, etc)
  - Limit organ meats (liver, kidney)
  - Limit nuts and seeds
  - Limit peanut or almond butter to 2 tablespoons per day
  - Drink clear beverages like 7 up®, Gingerale or Sprite® instead of dark colas

- Read nutrition labels and ingredient lists to detect if phosphate additives are used. This will help you to choose foods lower in phosphorus

- Take medications (phosphate binders) as prescribed (before meals). Examples: Apo-cal®, Tums®, Renagel®, Fosrenal®

- If you are on dialysis, don’t miss or shorten your treatments as phosphorous can build up in your body

2016 Talk to your Renal Dietitian for more information!