

Dietary advice for Pasifika with stage 3-4 chronic kidney disease (CKD).

By Prem Nand, Clinical Dietitian – Nutritionist, NZRD. <https://maximisednutrition.com>.

For Pacific Islanders with stage 3 or 4 chronic kidney disease and/or diabetes, managing nutrition is vital for maintaining health and preventing complications. High-starch carbohydrates such as cassava and taro are common in traditional diets, but eating these foods needs to be moderated due to their impact on blood sugar and kidney function.

Carbohydrate Management: Cassava and taro are high in starch and can significantly raise blood glucose levels. Where possible, opt for lower-glycaemic alternatives like sweet potatoes or squash in smaller portions to manage blood sugar more effectively. It's important to monitor portion sizes and balance carbohydrate intake with protein and fibre-rich foods to stabilize glucose levels.

Kidney-Friendly Choices: Limit high-potassium foods that are often present in Pasifika diets. Examples of three foods are given below:

Food item	Size	Amount of Potassium
Taro, boiled	200g	800mg
Cassava, boiled	200g	523mg
Taro leaves	1 cup	253mg
Coconut cream, fresh, prepared with water	1 cup	578mg

You can see how easily you can build up the potassium level. Of course, some of these foods are also high in carbohydrate.

Focus on lower-potassium options such as certain leafy greens (e.g., kale, spinach), and fruits like apples and berries.

Be cautious with salt (sodium) intake. Salt is added to most processed foods, so be mindful about adding extra salt to your foods. Eating salty foods can lead to fluid retention and high blood pressure, which can exacerbate kidney issues. Note that certain foods like corned beef is high in salt.

Hydration and Monitoring: Ensure adequate hydration, following any fluid intake advice given by your healthcare provider. It is usually only when the kidneys are not working well at end stage renal disease (Stage 5) that fluid restrictions come into effect, or if a doctor has prescribed fluid restriction for heart failure. Otherwise, it is important that you stay well hydrated. Regular monitoring of blood glucose and kidney function is crucial to adjust dietary needs as conditions evolve.

Attending events: One of the hardest parts of managing dietary restrictions for CKD and diabetes is choosing what to eat at social gatherings. Food is such a great part of Island culture. Clients are encouraged to think of long-term quality of life that can be gained by being careful with what, and how much, is eaten. Include the wider family group in making healthy food options available where possible. This can help make attending social functions easier.

Consult with a dietitian experienced in both renal and diabetic nutrition to create a personalized plan that respects cultural preferences while addressing medical needs effectively.

A bit about Prem Nand, Clinical Dietitian – Nutritionist, NZRD

Prem Nand is a New Zealand Registered Dietitian with more than 20 years experience as a clinical dietitian – nutritionist. Prem is initially from Fiji and growing up with neighbours that were from mixed ethnic and religious background, Prem understands the dietary practices of these clients. Prem specialises in multiple nutritional topics including Renal Health, Diabetes, Women's Health, Pain Management, Gut Health. Prem is based in Whangarei and can be contacted via her email (support@maximisednutrition.com) or via phone 027 332 0138. Visit her website maximisednutrition.com for more information.