FREE GUIDE

25 kidney-friendly foods

And the honest catch on every single one — the part the shareable food lists leave out.

- ☐ five groups, five foods each, chosen for a reason
- ☐ potassium, phosphorus and sodium flagged per food
- ☐ how to cook it to keep the food, drop the mineral
- ☐ six claims this guide refuses to make
- ☐ six questions to take to your nephrologist

25	5	25	6
FOODS	GROUPS	HONEST CATCHES	CLAIMS REFUSED

Most kidney food lists tell you what to eat.
This one tells you what to watch.

Read this first

Two pages that decide whether the rest of this guide helps you or hurts you

This is a food guide, not a prescription. Kidney disease is staged, and the same food can be a good idea at stage 2 and a bad idea at stage 4. Nothing here is a treatment, a cure, or a substitute for your nephrologist or renal dietitian.

Three numbers change everything in this list: your eGFR (how much function is left), your potassium, and your phosphorus. If you do not know them, get them from your last blood work before you change your diet.

Why this guide is built the way it is. There are a lot of kidney food lists online that say things like "eggs have zero potassium" or "this oil works like ibuprofen". They are written to be shared, not to be true. This one gives you 25 foods that are genuinely worth eating — and next to each one, the catch that the shareable version leaves out.

> **How to use it:** pick two foods from each of the five groups. That gives you a ten-food rotation you can actually shop for. Then read the cooking page — how you prepare a vegetable can matter as much as which vegetable you chose.

The six rules that do the heavy lifting

If you only read one page of this guide, read this one

1. Sodium is the lever with the most evidence
Cutting salt lowers blood pressure, and lower blood pressure means less pressure-driven damage in the kidney. It is also the change you can feel in a week. Aim under 2,000 mg a day unless your doctor sets a different number.

2. Additive phosphorus is the real target
Natural phosphorus in beans, dairy and nuts is absorbed at maybe 40–60%. Phosphate additives in processed food are absorbed at close to 100%. Same milligram, very different effect. Read the ingredient list for any word starting with 'phos'.

3. Potassium is a lab number, not a rule of thumb
At stage 1–2 most people do not need to restrict potassium. At stage 4–5 many do. Anyone who gives you a blanket 'avoid bananas' rule without asking for your labs is guessing.

4. Protein: enough, not maximal
Too little protein costs you muscle; too much adds nitrogen waste. The number is individual. A palm-sized portion at two meals is a reasonable starting shape, then adjust to your target.

5. Fibre feeds the gut, not the uremic toxins
A higher-fibre, plant-forward pattern is associated with lower production of indoxyl sulfate and p-cresyl sulfate — toxins that build up when kidney function drops. This is one of the better-supported mechanisms in the whole field.

6. Cook more, buy fewer ingredients
Almost every problem in this guide — sodium, additives, portion size — gets smaller when you cook from single ingredients. That is the cheapest intervention available to you.

Alliums and aromatics

The flavour base — so you need less salt

Onion

WHAT IS IN IT

Quercetin and sulphur compounds; raw onion is one of the better everyday sources.

HOW TO USE IT

Slice it into salads, or caramelise in a little olive oil for depth without salt.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Cooked onion is easier on a sensitive gut. Onion powder is fine, but check the jar is not an onion-salt blend.

Garlic

WHAT IS IN IT

Allicin, released only when the clove is crushed. Let it sit 10 minutes before cooking.

HOW TO USE IT

Two cloves in a pan is often the whole difference between bland and seasoned.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Garlic salt is salt. Garlic powder usually is not — read the label.

Leeks

WHAT IS IN IT

Milder than onion, high in fibre and in the same sulphur family.

HOW TO USE IT

Slice, rinse the grit out, sweat in olive oil. Good in soup and with eggs.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Like all of this group it carries potassium. Portion matters more than the food.

Chives and spring onion

WHAT IS IN IT

Gentle allium flavour with almost no cooking needed.

HOW TO USE IT

Cut over eggs, potatoes or rice at the end — this is where you buy back salt-free flavour.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Low volume, so lower potassium load than a whole onion. Still not free.

Fresh ginger

WHAT IS IN IT

Gingerol; used for nausea and used widely in kidney-friendly home cooking.

HOW TO USE IT

Grate into tea, fish, or lentils. Freeze the knob and grate from frozen.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Teas and supplements are not the same thing. Skip high-dose ginger capsules unless your doctor knows.

Greens and teas

Where most of the minerals live — and the most honest catches

Coriander (cilantro)

WHAT IS IN IT

Aromatic leaf, traditionally used in cooking across the Middle East and South Asia.

HOW TO USE IT

Big handfuls chopped into salads, chutney without salt, or over fish.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Herbs are low volume. Dried herb blends often hide salt — that is the real risk.

Parsley

WHAT IS IN IT

Vitamin K and antioxidants; a genuine flavour lift.

HOW TO USE IT

Flat-leaf in salads and tabbouleh-style dishes, or chopped over potatoes.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> If you take warfarin, keep vitamin K steady day to day rather than stopping parsley.

Arugula (rocket)

WHAT IS IN IT

Peppery leaf, useful when you are cutting salt and need bite.

HOW TO USE IT

Wilt into pasta at the last second, or eat raw with lemon and olive oil.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Leafy greens carry potassium. If your labs run high, your dietitian sets the portion, not a blog.

Nettle tea

WHAT IS IN IT

Long traditional use; human trial evidence in kidney disease is thin.

HOW TO USE IT

One cup as a drink, not as a treatment. Pleasant and caffeine-free.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> This is the one people over-trust. It does not replace medication, and 'kidney cleanse' blends often add other herbs.

Chamomile tea

WHAT IS IN IT

Caffeine-free, calming, easy on an evening routine.

HOW TO USE IT

One or two cups. Good swap for a cola in the evening.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Herbal teas are not automatically kidney-safe. Avoid blends listing licorice root (raises blood pressure).

Brassicas and ferments

Sulforaphane, fibre, and one sodium trap

Broccoli

WHAT IS IN IT

Sulforaphane, from the glucosinolate in the florets. Steaming keeps more of it than boiling.

HOW TO USE IT

Steam 4–5 minutes, finish with olive oil and lemon.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> High potassium. If you leach vegetables for your stage, broccoli is one to leach.

Cauliflower

WHAT IS IN IT

Fibre and vitamin C; a useful low-starch bulk for the plate.

HOW TO USE IT

Roast in florets, or rice it for a lighter base under curry.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Same potassium caveat as broccoli. Coloured varieties behave the same way.

Cabbage

WHAT IS IN IT

Fibre and glucosinolates; cheap and keeps for a week.

HOW TO USE IT

Shred raw for slaw with lemon, or braise slowly with a little oil.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Boiled and drained, it loses some potassium — which in CKD is sometimes exactly what you want.

Brussels sprouts

WHAT IS IN IT

Concentrated glucosinolates, good fibre.

HOW TO USE IT

Halve and roast until the edges brown; that is the flavour, not butter.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Small portion size is the honest answer here — they are potassium-dense.

Sauerkraut (rinsed)

WHAT IS IN IT

Fermented cabbage: live cultures and acidity where salt used to be.

HOW TO USE IT

Rinse it. A tablespoon adds sharpness to a sandwich or a plate of eggs.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Unrinsed sauerkraut is a salt bomb — one serving can carry a day's sodium. Rinse, then taste.

Seeds, nuts and pulses

Small volume, real minerals — measure these

Ground flaxseed

WHAT IS IN IT

Omega-3 ALA and lignans; grind it or it passes through whole.

HOW TO USE IT

One tablespoon into oats or yogurt. Keep the bag in the fridge.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Phosphorus is present. One tablespoon is a portion — a cup is not.

Chia

WHAT IS IN IT

Soluble fibre that gels; helps with fullness and regularity.

HOW TO USE IT

A teaspoon to a tablespoon in water or yogurt, left 10 minutes.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Also a phosphorus source. Count it if your phosphorus runs high.

Pumpkin seeds

WHAT IS IN IT

Magnesium, zinc, plant protein.

HOW TO USE IT

A small handful, or scattered on a salad for crunch instead of croutons.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Potassium and phosphorus are both meaningful here. Measure, do not pour.

Walnuts

WHAT IS IN IT

The best plant omega-3 of the common nuts.

HOW TO USE IT

Four or five halves, chopped into a salad or over yogurt.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Nuts are mineral-dense across the board. A handful is a portion, not a snack-bowl.

Green peas

WHAT IS IN IT

Plant protein and fibre; frozen is as good as fresh.

HOW TO USE IT

A small cup stirred through rice, or mashed roughly with olive oil and mint.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Higher potassium than most green vegetables. Portion again.

Fish, eggs, fruit and fat

Protein, omega-3, and the two corrections worth making

Wild salmon

WHAT IS IN IT

Omega-3 EPA and DHA, and complete protein.

HOW TO USE IT

A palm-sized piece, twice a week. Bake with lemon, no salt rub.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Farmed or wild, the omega-3 is the point. Watch portion for protein targets, not because salmon is 'bad'.

Sardines

WHAT IS IN IT

Omega-3 plus calcium if you eat the bones.

HOW TO USE IT

Buy in olive oil or water, not brine. Rinse if you only have brine.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Tinned fish in brine is a sodium trap. This is the swap that matters most in this group.

Eggs

WHAT IS IN IT

High-quality protein in a small package.

HOW TO USE IT

Boiled, poached or scrambled in olive oil. Yolk included unless your lipids say otherwise.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Eggs are not 'zero potassium'. One large egg has roughly 60 mg potassium and about 95 mg phosphorus — the yolk carries most of the phosphorus. If your phosphorus is high, ask about the yolk.

Berries

WHAT IS IN IT

Anthocyanins and fibre with a low sugar load.

HOW TO USE IT

Frozen berries are cheaper and just as good. Over yogurt or on their own.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Lower potassium than banana or orange, but not zero. A cup is a portion.

Olive oil and turmeric

WHAT IS IN IT

Extra virgin olive oil for polyphenols; turmeric for curcumin, which is poorly absorbed without fat and pepper.

HOW TO USE IT

Oil as the finisher, not the fryer. Turmeric in the pan with the oil, plus black pepper.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Olive oil is not ibuprofen. Curcumin is not a drug and interacts with blood thinners — tell your doctor if you supplement.

The cooking page nobody gives you

How to keep the food and drop some of the mineral

Leaching works, and it is simple. Peel and cut the vegetable into small pieces, soak in a large bowl of warm water for at least two hours, then rinse and boil in a big pot of fresh water, and throw that water away. Studies of this method show substantial potassium reductions in potatoes and other vegetables — often in the range of a third to a half, depending on the vegetable and the timing. It is not perfect and it is not free: you lose some water-soluble vitamins too.

Do not drink the cooking water. This sounds obvious and it is the most common mistake. Soup made from vegetable water, or a stew where nothing is drained, keeps every milligram you were trying to remove.

Steam instead of boil when potassium is not your problem. If your potassium is normal, boiling and draining costs you nutrients for no reason. Steam 4–5 minutes and keep the texture.

Rinse anything that came in brine. Sardines, sauerkraut, olives, canned beans. Thirty seconds under the tap removes a meaningful share of the surface sodium. It does not make a high-sodium food low-sodium, but it moves it in the right direction.

Salt at the end, not during. Salt on the surface of food tastes saltier than the same amount dissolved through it. You will use less and notice it more.

> **THE HONEST CATCH**
>
> Leaching is a tactic for a lab number, not a virtue. If your potassium is in range, over-boiling your vegetables just makes them worse and your diet smaller. Ask before you adopt it.

The short list to keep small

Six things that cause more harm than any food on the 25 list causes good

ITEM	WHY
Star fruit (carambola)	Avoid completely in CKD. It contains a neurotoxin that people with reduced kidney function cannot clear — reported cases include hiccups, confusion and seizures.
Salt substitutes (potassium chloride)	These are sold as 'heart healthy' and are dangerous in CKD. They are potassium, and potassium is the mineral your kidneys are already struggling to clear.
Colas and pepper-type sodas	Phosphoric acid adds phosphorus in a form that is absorbed almost completely. This is the additive problem, not the natural phosphorus in food.
Processed and cured meats	Phosphate additives plus sodium. Deli meat, sausage and ham are the highest-yield things to cut if you cut one thing.
'Kidney cleanse' and detox supplements	Unregulated, frequently adulterated, and a known cause of kidney injury. This is the single most expensive mistake in this guide.
Licorice root and licorice sweets	Raises blood pressure and drops potassium. Check herbal tea blends, which often hide it.

Claims this guide will not make

The six lines you will find on almost every other kidney food list — and why they are not here

IT REVERSES KIDNEY DISEASE

Nothing in a food list reverses CKD. Some diets slow progression and lower risk. 'Reverse' is the word that sells a PDF and loses a patient's trust.

THIS FOOD HAS ZERO POTASSIUM

No whole food has zero potassium, and any page that says so has not read a food table. Eggs, for example, are lower than a banana but not zero.

DETOX YOUR KIDNEYS

Your kidneys are the detox organ. There is no food that 'flushes' them, and herbal detox blends are one of the more common causes of avoidable kidney injury.

APPLE CIDER VINEGAR WORKS LIKE A MEDICINE

It is vinegar. It may blunt a glucose spike a little when eaten with a meal. It does not treat kidney disease, and it does not replace anything your doctor prescribed.

OLIVE OIL WORKS LIKE IBUPROFEN

Oleocanthal does share a pathway with ibuprofen in a lab dish. That is not the same as a dose, and the comparison has no place in a patient guide.

HERBS INSTEAD OF TABLETS

Some herbs interact with blood pressure drugs, blood thinners and immunosuppressants. Herbs are add-ons at best and risks at worst. Tell your care team what you take.

A day on the plate

A shape, not a diet — adjust the portions to your numbers

MEAL	SHAPE OF IT
Morning	Eggs or oats, a small handful of berries, ground flaxseed, water or chamomile tea. No deli meat.
Midday	Half the plate vegetables from the list, a palm of fish or peas, olive oil and lemon instead of dressing from a bottle.
Evening	Same shape, different group. Leach the vegetables if your potassium is high. Rinse anything tinned.
Between	Chives or herbs on everything. A small measured handful of seeds or walnuts — not the bag.

Sodium target under 2,000 mg a day unless your doctor says otherwise. Protein to your own target. Potassium and phosphorus to your labs.

What to ask at your next appointment

Take this page with you — six questions that change what you eat

1. Given my latest eGFR, potassium and phosphorus, what is my daily potassium ceiling — in milligrams, not 'low'?
2. Do I need to leach vegetables, or is that only for a later stage?
3. What is my protein target in grams per day, and how much of it should be plant protein?
4. Which of my current medications change how I should handle potassium and sodium?
5. Is my phosphorus high from food, or from additives — and how do I tell the difference on a label?
6. Should I be referred to a renal dietitian, and is that covered?

Where this comes from

The sources behind the claims that are actually claims

This guide draws on public patient education from the **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)** and the **National Kidney Foundation**, on the **KDIGO** clinical practice guidance for blood pressure and nutrition in chronic kidney disease, and on the DASH diet trial literature for the sodium and blood-pressure relationship.

- NIDDK, chronic kidney disease and diet: niddk.nih.gov/health-information/kidney-disease/chronic-kidney-disease-ckd
- National Kidney Foundation, nutrition and CKD: kidney.org
- KDIGO guidelines: kdigo.org/guidelines
- DASH–Sodium trial (NEJM, 2001) for the sodium and blood pressure dose-response
- Published leaching studies on potassium reduction in vegetables, and the phosphate-additive absorption literature

Written by Hardy, a patient living with type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and CKD — not by a clinic. Every number in this guide that is your number has to come from your own lab work.

Keep reading on hardy4.tech

This guide is one page of a bigger site written from the same chair you are sitting in. These are the pages that pair with it — all free, no email needed:

- What the CKD stages actually mean, in plain numbers
- Potassium at stage 3: which foods, which portions, why the lab number decides
- The symptoms people notice late — and the ones worth checking early
- Can kidney disease be reversed? The honest answer, without the sales pitch
- Diabetes and kidney stones: what actually changes when both are on your chart
- Start here — the whole site: hardy4.tech