

## Albumin

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### What is albumin?

Albumin is a protein found in the blood. The amount of albumin you have in your blood is measured every month when you have your blood tested. Normal albumin is 40 grams a litre.

- Your albumin for the month of \_\_\_\_\_ was \_\_\_\_\_.

### Why is albumin important?

In general, the amount of albumin in the blood is a guide for how good your nutrition has been or is. People with low albumin may be poorly nourished. Studies show that people on dialysis with normal albumin levels do better than people with lower albumin. They get sick less often, are hospitalized less and live longer.

A low albumin means that you are not eating enough protein in your diet. Albumin can also be low when you do not eat enough quantity of food to get enough calories. You need calories to meet your body's needs each day. Calories also help your body use protein foods better.

### What causes low albumin?

There are many reasons for low albumin. Here are a few reasons:

- Poor nutrition which may be caused by nausea, vomiting and feeling sick.
- Protein is lost during dialysis treatments. It passes from your blood into the dialysis fluid and drained out of your body. When you are on dialysis, you need more protein.
- Depression, social isolation or not being able to buy the right types of food can also affect whether you eat properly.
- Some infections such as peritonitis can cause albumin to escape through the membrane during dialysis treatments. Infection or inflammation in your body can result in a low albumin level. You may not be able to increase albumin until the infection or inflammation is treated.

## What foods contain protein?

Good quality, protein food sources are meat, such as beef, pork, veal and lamb. Fish, chicken, turkey, peanut butter and eggs are also good sources. Milk, cheese and yogurt contain good quality protein, but you have to limit the amounts because they are high in phosphorus and potassium.

Bread, pasta, rice, cereals, vegetables and fruit contain smaller amounts of protein.



**Eating balanced meals including protein foods, starches, vegetables and fruits is important to meet your nutrition needs.**

## How can I increase my albumin?

You will need to increase the amount of good quality protein you eat every day. First check your meal plan to see if you are using all of your protein portions. Also, find out if you are using all of your other food categories.

**Your meal plan is designed especially for you to meet your body's need for protein and calories while you are on dialysis.**

## How can I increase the amount of protein I eat?

Here are some tips to increase the amount of protein in your diet every day:

- Eat your biggest meal at a time in the day when your appetite is best.
- Include a protein item, even if it is a small portion in each meal. For example, have an egg or peanut butter or cheese for breakfast.
- Do not miss meals because it makes it harder to make up for protein at another meal. If you miss a meal, you will have to eat a larger portion of protein at the next meal.
- If you have a small appetite, snacks help you add extra protein and calories. Therefore, try to eat between meals and before bedtime.

- Add cooked, diced or ground meat or poultry to soups, casseroles and stews.
- Eat cottage cheese with fruit, peanut butter on melba toast and cheese with a muffin.
- Add tuna or grated hard-boiled egg to sauces. Serve over pasta, rice or toast.
- Blend cottage cheese with sour cream and herbs to dip vegetables.
- List foods that you love within your diet guide. Prepare some of them ahead of time so they will be ready when you need a quick meal.
- Eat fats and sugar containing foods to boost up calories for good use of proteins. Here are some tips to help:

- Use extra-unsalted margarine, oils or sour cream on vegetables, pasta, noodles, potatoes, bread and rolls.
- Use homemade salad dressings on salads.
- Use sugar, jelly, jam, syrup and honey.
- Use Coffeerich™ instead of milk. It is low in potassium and phosphorus.
- Drink non-cola pop, crystal drinks and cranberry juice instead of water.



- People with diabetes who cannot use sugar-containing foods, may rely on extra fats.

## Do I need to take a nutrition supplement?

Your dietitian may recommend a nutrition supplement for you. The choice will depend on your needs, the results of your blood tests and your personal preferences. Your dietitian will talk to you about a supplement that is right for you.

## **How long does it take for albumin to return to normal?**

Albumin is a protein that builds up slowly. It may take 3 or more weeks of eating well to see an effect. Be patient and continue to do your part.