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Snowstorm Health: Tips for People on Dialysis

From the IPRO ESRD Network of New York ESRD Disaster Preparedness Coalition (EDPC)

With winter upon us, it is time to prepare for snowstorms. If you are on dialysis, it is important that you are prepared for any changes in your treatment schedule due to an emergency.

If possible, you should have an emergency stock of supplies, food and medicines.

If you are on Home Dialysis, it is important that you are prepared for the possibility of delivery delays and power outages. Watch the weather forecasts; if a snowstorm is coming, start your treatment earlier rather than later in case there are power interruptions.

Remember, if there is a storm and it affects electricity, having warm blankets, gloves and a hat on hand can help prevent hypothermia. Generally, if there's no electricity, there's no heat.

If a snowstorm makes it impossible for you to get to dialysis:

- Call your facility as soon as possible for guidance about what you should do.
- Be extra careful about following your dietary restrictions and limiting fluid intake. You need to start an Emergency Diet as soon as you know that you will be missing treatments.
- If you are running out of prescription medications and can't leave your home, ask a friend, relative or neighbor for help.
- If you must go to a shelter, tell the person in charge about your medical needs (the type and frequency of your dialysis).
- If you have to leave home, make sure your dialysis facility knows where to find you.

Signs & Symptoms of distress and when to call 911

Remember: Hospitals may not be equipped to provide maintenance dialysis treatments unless you are in distress, the ambulance may take you to the emergency room, but then you may have difficulty getting home.

If you experience any of these symptoms, call 911

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in breathing patterns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Unable to sleep at night due to difficulty breathing ○ Heavy, labored breathing ○ Difficulty breathing • Swelling throughout the body • Confusion • Any sudden changes in access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unusually high blood pressure • Intense headache • Sudden generalized weakness • Chest pain • Nausea, vomiting • Bleeding i.e. blood in vomit, or black tarry stool; any excessive bleeding • Abdominal pain • Fever
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On the next page, please see our Emergency Diet Guidelines

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Emergency Diet Guidelines

Fluid

- Fluids need to be restricted further. Intake of no more than 2 cups a day for three days should prevent symptoms of shortness of breath and fluid buildup.
- Drink only 4oz of fluid with meals (total 1.5 cups fluid). This leaves ½ cup to take with medications
- Incorporate phosphate binders into fluid allowance.
- Chew gum for thirst.
- Limit fresh fruit and vegetables. Keep a supply of canned fruit and vegetables on hand. Drain extra fluid from canned products. Always purchase "no salt added" canned vegetables, and if you have diabetes, purchase light or no-sugar added products.

Sodium

- Avoid table salt and salt substitutes
- Flavor/Season foods with fresh or powdered onion, garlic, spices, herb blends, vinegar or lemon juice.

Remember: Many products marked "low sodium" can also be high potassium. When buying packaged food, use the Nutrition Facts label to check salt/sodium content. Use the % DV to look for foods that are low in sodium and low in potassium (potassium is not always listed on food labels). Avoid "low sodium" foods which list "potassium chloride" on the ingredients label.

Potassium

- Avoid fruits and vegetables high in potassium.
- Keep a list of high potassium foods on your refrigerator.
- **Avoid high potassium fruits:** e.g., apricots, bananas, dates, honeydew melon, kiwifruit, nectarine, oranges, orange juice, prune juice, prunes, and raisins.
- **Avoid high potassium vegetables:** e.g., artichokes, avocado, fresh beets, brussels sprouts, chard, "greens" (beet, collard and mustard), okra, parsnips, potatoes, pumpkin, rutabagas, spinach, sweet potatoes, tomatoes and tomato sauce, winter squash and yams.
- **Other foods to avoid:** bran, dried beans & peas, nuts, potato chips, salt substitute, soy or nut milk, yogurt.

Tip: Purchase light or no-sugar added fruit such as pineapple, pears, mixed fruit (drain extra fluid from can). Read labels carefully (for low salt/sodium and low potassium) on any canned vegetables.

Good choices are: string beans, corn, carrots, peas, cauliflower or canned beets.

If you have electricity and internet access, the booklet: *Guide for People on Dialysis: Preparing for Emergencies*, is available on line. It provides a three-day emergency diet and other helpful information.

English: <http://esrd.ipro.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Prep4Emerg.pdf>

Spanish: http://esrd.ipro.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/preparese_para_emergencias2.pdf