



## Become a Healthy Living Champion

A diagnosis of end-stage renal disease (ESRD) can overwhelm a patient and for some, it may feel like life as they know it is over. In addition to health-related challenges, ESRD patients deal with behavioral, social, and socioeconomic challenges. For all these reasons patients may lose hope that they can live a full life with kidney disease; that perspective may lead them to ignore issues related to their overall health.

### How can you help?

One of the most important things you can do is to help your patients understand the importance of doing their best to maintain their health, with a goal to improve their quality of life. Here are some basic guidelines for supporting your patients as they work toward achieving a better state of health.

### 1. Encourage preventative care.

- a. Stress the importance of maintaining an ongoing relationship with a primary care physician (PCP) as well as a nephrologist: Collaboration between a PCP and a kidney patient is essential to optimal care. The PCP can ensure that the patient is scheduled for important screenings and other preventative measures that will facilitate detection and treatment of illnesses for which the patient is at risk. This will help prevent additional comorbid conditions.
- b. Support vaccination: The average age of patients on dialysis is > 60; for this reason, and because kidney patients are immunocompromised, they are at a higher risk than the general population for developing a serious illness. Encouraging patients to get their routine vaccinations on time can eliminate unnecessary hospitalizations, the spread of infectious diseases, and potential death.

### 2. Set goals for physical activity and exercise.

Physical activity is very important for individuals with kidney disease; it helps to boost energy, improves sleep patterns, strengthens the patient's musculoskeletal system, and helps prevent depression. It may also reduce the risk of complications, including heart disease.

- a. Talk to your patient to help identify a type of exercise that can be done with their dialysis access and current health condition. This might include walking, cycling, swimming, dancing, or other activities.
- b. Encourage your patient to talk with their physician before starting an exercise routine to help ensure a safe start.
- c. Encourage your patient to gradually build to an exercise routine of 30 minutes, four-five times per week if they can do so.

### 3. Understand the patient's barriers, and encourage optimal nutrition and a healthy weight.

Limited health literacy and uncertainty about proper food choices, lack of time to shop and cook healthy meals, and income restrictions are among the many barriers to patients understanding and implementing prescribed therapeutic nutrition plans/diets. Here are ways to overcome those barriers:

- a. Ensure that patients have access to a specially trained renal dietitian who can support them in overcoming these barriers and help them understand that proper nutrition is an essential component of their health.
- b. Assess patients for food insecurity, and involve the social worker in obtaining resources if there is a concern.
- c. Help patients implement a healthier diet to support caloric intake to either lose or gain weight in order to achieve an optimal weight for their health.

### 4. Listen carefully to patients to ensure that you're aware of any other factors that can affect their overall health.

A patient's financial situation, mental health, and psychosocial support system are other factors that can affect their health. Watch for any signs that might indicate one or more of these issues is affecting the patient, and if so, connect the patient to a social worker for help in addressing the concerns.

## Become a Healthy Living Champion (continued)

### 5. Become a Healthy Living Champion

- a. Adopting a healthy lifestyle is a journey that is made one step at a time and includes many areas of focus. A Healthy Living Champion can serve as a dedicated resource to lead a facility's integrated team approach aimed at helping patients work to achieve improved health.
- b. Healthy Living Champions are employees who are passionate about:
- advocating on behalf of patients,
  - empowering patients and promoting healthy behaviors.
  - supporting patients in their efforts to live healthier lives, and
  - actively promoting wellness goals and preventative care measures within your facility.

Healthy Living Champions strive to increase staff and patient engagement by being approachable and willing to help patients thrive while on dialysis.

They distribute information about wellness activities, resources, and interventions.

Healthy Living Champions will become the face of wellness initiatives and campaigns across a facility.

Use the table below as a checklist of roles and responsibilities to determine if helping patients live a healthy lifestyle is the right fit for you!

### The Roles and Responsibilities of a Healthy Living Champion

✓	ROLE	RESPONSIBILITIES
	<b>Promoter</b>	Promote wellness activities and share communications and resources with patients.
	<b>Supporter</b>	Initiate efforts to support healthy lifestyle choices and allocate time to spend with patients.
	<b>Motivator</b>	Engage and encourage patients to play an active role in their health care, to be healthier, and to effectively work toward their goals.
	<b>Liaison</b>	Be the “go-to” person within the facility who works with an interdisciplinary team and patient facility representatives to provide education on wellness across the facility.
	<b>Organizer</b>	Work with the Network to help track progress and measure success of wellness initiatives and campaigns.

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