

Kidney MAGAZINE

WINTER 2026

VOLUME NO. 4.1 | Winter 2026

COOKING WITH CARE

When AI gets kidney diets wrong and how to safely use it for recipe inspiration

THE ULTIMATE SHEETPAN COOKING GUIDE

Recipes, techniques, and tips, for easy, flavour-packed, kidney-friendly meals

SIDE BY SIDE

Insights and advice from a care partner

MINDFUL MEDITATION

A beginner's meditation guide for people living with kidney disease

GINGER LEMON TEA

A simple recipe, perfect for a winter's day

WINTER WORK

Why kidneys work harder in the colder months and how you can help



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THE WINTER ISSUE

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letter from the editor

Dear reader,

Winter in BC and the Yukon has a way of slowing us down, sometimes in the best possible way. The snow, the long nights, and the quiet stillness can invite reflection and rest. But for those living with kidney disease or caring for someone who is, the colder months can bring unique challenges on both the body and mind.

In this issue, we explore how cold weather and winter habits can place extra stress on the kidneys, and what you can do to stay balanced and healthy throughout the season. From understanding how sitting too long can affect your health, to discovering simple ways to keep your circulation and energy moving, our goal is to help you feel your best all winter long.

You'll also find a complete guide to roasting vegetables in our winter cooking class feature, along with easy, kidney-friendly recipes that bring warmth and comfort to your table. For those looking to support their emotional and mental wellbeing, we share meditation practices designed with kidney health in mind—small moments of calm that can make a big difference.

Finally, we're honoured to include a special interview with a mother of a son with kidney disease. Her story of compassion and resilience reminds us how deeply community and connection shape the journey through chronic illness. She offers an honest, hopeful look at what it means to support a loved one through the ups and downs of kidney disease.

So, whether you're spending the winter surrounded by snow or simply watching the rain fall on the coast, we hope these pages bring you a sense of inspiration and care. Stay warm, stay connected, and take good care of yourself this season.

Andrea Rudy
Editor

CHINESE Egg Tarts

2 cups fluffed all-purpose flour
12 tbsp unsalted butter, slightly softened
2 tbsp cold water
½ cup granulated sugar
1 cup hot water
½ cup evaporated oat or regular* milk at room temperature
3 large eggs
1 tsp vanilla extract

* If using regular evaporated milk, choose one without phosphorous additives if possible.

In a bowl, add the flour and butter. (Make sure the butter is soft enough to break up with your fingers but not too soft to form a paste with the flour.) Working quickly, break it up until it resembles coarse crumbs with some small chunks of butter still visible.

Add cold water and bring the dough together with your hands. Add ½ – 1 tsp more water if needed. At this point, the dough will be scraggly and dry. Wrap dough tightly in plastic wrap or a reusable bag and refrigerate for 20 minutes.

On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough into a roughly 6×15 inch rectangle. Roll quickly to avoid overworking it. Fold the top third of the dough down to the center then the bottom third up and over that. Give the dough a quarter turn and roll out again to a 6×15 inch rectangle. Fold the same way as before, cover, and chill for 1 hour.

While the dough is resting, dissolve the sugar into 1 cup of hot water and cool to room temperature. Whisk milk, eggs, and vanilla together and then whisk in the sugar water. Strain through a fine-meshed strainer into a large measuring cup or pitcher.

Position a rack in the lower third of oven and heat to 375° F/190°C.

Roll out the dough 5mm thick and cut into 4-inch circles to fit mini tart tins or a shallow non-stick standard muffin pan, leaving a lip going over the top of the cup (the tart shells will shrink as they bake, so you want ample clearance). Re-roll extra dough and cut more circles until you have about 16.

Fill the tart shells evenly to about three-quarters full and immediately but slowly and carefully transfer pan to oven. Reduce the heat to 350°F/180°C, and bake for 26-29 minutes until the filling is just set (if a toothpick can stand up in it, it's done). Allow the tarts to cool for at least 10 minutes before enjoying.

Recipe from kidneycommunitykitchen.ca

In celebration of Chinese New Year, try this twist on the classic Hong Kong-style egg tart, adapted to be kidney friendly.





Ginger *Lemon* Tea

Ginger, honey, lemon, and mint in tea is a simple, soothing choice for the colder months. Ginger adds warmth and may help with digestion, lemon provides a refreshing source of vitamin C, and honey offers natural sweetness while coating the throat. Together, they make a comforting drink to enjoy on chilly days or when you're feeling under the weather.

4 cups water
½ cup ginger, roughly chopped
1 large lemon, sliced into rounds
2 sprigs of mint
3 tsp honey

Fill a pot with water. Add the ginger, lemon, and mint. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and steep for 20 minutes. Pour into a mug. Enjoy!

Note: Transplant patients or those with lowered immunity should use processed honey to reduce the risk of infection, and if you are watching potassium, enjoy lemon in moderation.

Contributor: Renita Swan

Sitting Too Long

How to **BREAK** the Habit

Contributor: Joey Ficocelli, R.Kin

When the winter months arrive, many of us naturally spend more time indoors. Shorter days, colder temperatures, and slippery sidewalks make comfortable couches and warm blankets even more appealing. But for people living with kidney disease, sitting inactive for too long can carry hidden risks that go beyond stiff muscles or low energy.

Why Sitting Too Long Matters for Kidney Health

Prolonged sitting is linked to several health concerns, and for kidney patients, the impact can be even greater.

Reduced Circulation – Sitting for hours slows blood flow, which may increase swelling in the legs and ankles, a common concern for those with kidney issues. This is a risk factor for quicker kidney function decline.

Higher Blood Pressure – Long periods of inactivity can worsen blood pressure control, putting more strain on the kidneys.

Blood Sugar Spikes – Physical inactivity makes it harder for the body to regulate blood sugar, which is especially important for kidney patients with diabetes.

Muscle Loss – Staying still too often leads to muscle weakness, making it harder to stay active and independent.

Why Winter Increases the Risk

Cold weather tends to keep people inside, reducing opportunities for

outdoor walks or social activities. Add in extra screen time—TV marathons, scrolling phones, or working at the computer—and hours of sitting can add up quickly.

Small Steps That Make a Big Difference

The good news is you don't need a gym or fancy equipment to interrupt long sitting stretches. Try these simple, kidney-safe strategies.



SET A MOVEMENT TIMER

Every 30–60 minutes, stand up and move for at least 2–3 minutes or intentionally move in your chair. Even light activity helps circulation.

CHAIR EXERCISES

While sitting, try gentle leg lifts, ankle circles, or seated marches. These can be especially helpful for those with limited mobility.

HOUSEHOLD ACTIVITIES

Turn chores into mini workouts—fold laundry standing up, do light cleaning, or put groceries away one item at a time.

STRETCHING BREAKS

Gentle stretches can reduce

stiffness, improve posture, and relieve stress.

INDOOR WALKING

If it's too icy outside, walk laps around your home, climb stairs if safe, march in place during TV commercials, or turn on one song and dance for the duration.

COMBINE MOVEMENT WITH ENJOYMENT

Listen to music, follow along with a gentle exercise video, or try indoor hobbies that require standing, such as cooking or crafting.

For kidney patients, breaking up long sitting periods is more than a lifestyle choice—it's an important part of protecting kidney function, heart health, independence, and overall wellbeing. This winter, make it a goal to add small bursts of movement throughout your day. Even a few minutes at a time can help support your kidneys, keep your body strong, and lift your mood.

HAVE YOU TRIED AN EXERCISE SNACK?

These 2–10-minute bouts of movement following each meal help build strength, stability, and endurance, and reduce potential risk of injury while walking. To learn more, visit kidneywellnesshub.ca.

Winter Work

Why Kidneys Work Harder in the Colder Months

Contributor: Mercedeh Kiaii, MD, FRCPC

Winter places unique demands on our kidneys. It changes how our body balances fluids, blood pressure, and waste. Understanding why kidneys may be under extra strain in the colder months helps us take practical steps to protect them, adjust our habits, and reduce the risk of added stress on the body during winter.

FLUID BALANCE BECOMES MORE COMPLICATED

Many people feel less thirsty in the cold, so they may drink less water. At the same time, the body loses fluids more quickly in dry winter air through breathing and evaporation. The kidneys must work harder to keep fluids and electrolytes balanced, often producing more concentrated urine. This can increase the risk of kidney stones and make it harder for the kidneys to maintain equilibrium.

SALT-HEAVY COMFORT FOODS

Winter diets often lean on canned soups, cured meats, and other salty favourites, which can increase blood pressure, putting extra pressure on the kidneys.

COLD-WEATHER BLOOD PRESSURE SPIKES

Blood pressure is often “silent.” Unlike thirst (which reminds you to drink) or fatigue (which tells you to rest), high blood pressure has no clear symptoms until serious harm is done. That’s why it’s the most important factor to watch closely in winter (see opposite page).

LESS MOVEMENT, SLOWER CIRCULATION

Staying indoors and moving less can affect how well your body processes fluids, leaving more work for your kidneys.

EXTRA BURDEN FROM ILLNESS

Winter infections like colds and flu increase waste in the body. Medications used to fight them can also add stress on the kidneys.

HORMONAL STRESS RESPONSE

Cold exposure stimulates the release of stress hormones like adrenaline and noradrenaline. These hormones prepare the body to conserve heat and energy, but they also raise blood pressure and alter kidney function. The kidneys must then adjust filtration and fluid reabsorption processes to cope with these hormonal changes.

VITAMIN D DEFICIENCY

Vitamin D supports strong bones and helps regulate calcium and phosphate. It is primarily produced by the body through exposure to sunlight, so with reduced sunlight hours it is important to ensure vitamin D levels remain steady.

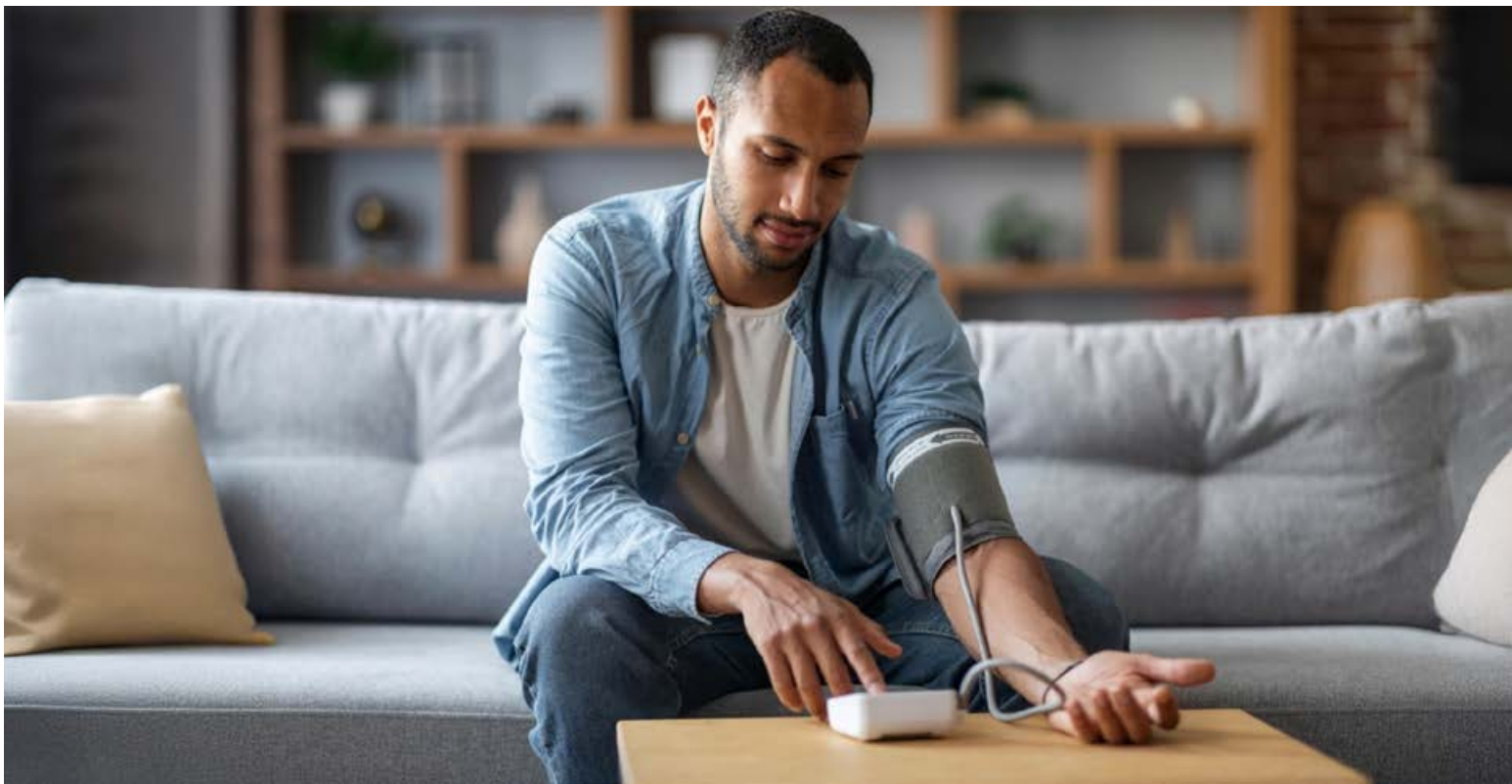
WINTER ILLNESS REMEDIES

Pain relievers like ibuprofen and other NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) can worsen kidney problems, while high doses of vitamin C can increase the risk of kidney stones. Talk to your healthcare provider before taking new medicines or supplements.

Your kidneys work tirelessly year-round, but in winter, a little extra care can go a long way.

- Drink water regularly, even if you don’t feel thirsty.
- Choose lower-sodium versions of your favourite winter foods.
- Keep active indoors with gentle exercise.
- Monitor your blood pressure.
- Talk to your healthcare provider if you notice swelling, changes in urination, or fatigue.





Why does cold weather raise blood pressure?

The kidneys' primary role is to filter waste products and excess fluid from the blood, keeping the body's internal environment balanced. To do this, they rely on a dense network of tiny blood vessels called glomeruli. These microscopic filters are delicate and highly sensitive to changes in blood pressure.

When blood pressure is consistently high, the force of blood flowing through these small vessels is stronger than normal. Over time, this constant strain causes the vessel walls to thicken and stiffen, reducing blood flow into the glomeruli. With less blood passing through, the kidneys cannot effectively remove toxins, regulate electrolytes, or maintain fluid balance.

As kidney function declines, waste products build up in the bloodstream, leading to symptoms like fatigue, swelling, and changes in urination.

For people already living with CKD, even small seasonal spikes in blood pressure—like those commonly seen in colder months—can speed up this process. Winter-related increases in blood pressure may seem minor, but because the kidneys are already under strain, these fluctuations can tip the balance and contribute to further loss of kidney function.

The kidneys don't just respond to blood pressure, they also help regulate it. When blood pressure rises, the kidneys have to adjust fluid and salt balance to bring it down. If they can't keep up, blood pressure climbs higher, creating a vicious cycle.

By staying warm, monitoring blood pressure, making mindful food choices, and keeping up with healthy routines, people with kidney disease can reduce their risks and protect their kidney health all winter long.

Managing Your Blood Pressure in Cold Weather

Monitor Blood Pressure Regularly

Check your blood pressure at home, especially during colder months. Share

your readings with your healthcare provider to see if adjustments are needed.

Dress Warmly and Stay Active

Keeping your body warm helps blood vessels stay relaxed. Even light indoor exercise like walking in place, stretching, or low-impact routines supports circulation and helps regulate blood pressure.

Manage Stress and Sleep

Shorter days and holiday pressures can raise stress, which also increases blood pressure. Relaxation techniques like meditation, deep breathing, or listening to calming music can help. Visit kidneywellnesshub.ca for more relaxation tips.

Pro Tip: Warm up indoors with gentle movement like stretching or walking around the house. This boosts circulation and helps counteract the blood pressure spike that comes with the cold.

SHEET PAN COOKING is all about preparing an entire meal—protein, vegetables, and even grains—on baking sheets. Everything cooks together in the oven, creating flavourful, well-balanced dishes with minimal effort. Proteins often have different roasting times, so can be added before or after the vegetables as needed. Follow our guide to mastering the art of sheet pan vegetables and discover a world of new dinner ideas at your fingertips.



Love Your Leftovers

Roasted vegetables warm up well in the oven or microwave without losing much texture. Softer vegetables are great for pureed soups and fritters, while firmer vegetables work well in protein bowls, pasta, and wraps. Making a large sheet pan batch lets you divide it into kidney-friendly portions for the week; or better yet, flash freeze and use for up to three months from frozen.



The Ultimate SHEET PAN COOKING GUIDE

Contributor: Dani Renouf, RD, MSc

When life gets busy, healthy food often falls by the wayside. But there's one method that can save time, minimize cleanup, and still deliver delicious, balanced meals: sheet pan cooking. This approach is a favourite for home cooks and health-conscious eaters alike, because it's simple, versatile, and surprisingly cost-effective. Not least of all, roasting brings out all the wonderful flavours in vegetables. Try mastering a few things like quantity required for leftover meals, time per vegetable, and flavour options.

Healthy Choices Made Easy: By controlling seasonings and using whole ingredients, you can keep sodium, fat, and additives in check.

Endless Variety: Mix and match proteins (chicken, fish, tofu) with vegetables (carrots, broccoli, peppers, squash) for new combinations each time.

Sheet Pan Basics

Choose the Right Pan: A large, rimmed baking sheet works best. Lining it with parchment paper or foil makes cleanup even easier.

Balance Cooking Times: Pair vegetables that cook at similar speeds, or cut root vegetables into smaller pieces so everything is ready together.

Season Simply: Olive oil, herbs, and spices go a long way. A squeeze of lemon or splash of vinegar at the end brightens flavours.

Don't Crowd the Pan: Spread ingredients out so they roast evenly without steaming. Don't be afraid to use two pans as needed.

Sizing Vegetables and Combinations

Uniformity is key. The most critical rule is to cut all your vegetables into similar sizes so they cook evenly. If you are putting the vegetables in the oven at the same time, aim for about 1-inch pieces, ensuring they are easy to eat and achieve a good balance of tenderness and crispiness. They shrink about 25%, so err on the side of too large. Cut

carrots on a slight diagonal for more visual interest and greater surface area for caramelization.

Soft, quick-cooking vegetables like asparagus or green beans can often be left whole as they roast quickly. If you are roasting root vegetables with high moisture vegetables be sure not to mix them or use separate pans so they don't steam.

Sheet Pan Cooking for Kidney Health

For those supporting kidney health, sheet pan meals can be adapted easily:

- Use low-sodium marinades or spice blends instead of salt-heavy sauces.
- Choose kidney-friendly vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower, green beans, or bell peppers.
- Cook smaller portions of protein, balancing with more vegetables to meet dietary needs.

Roasting also keeps nutrients intact while using little oil, making it a heart- and kidney-healthy cooking method.

Roasting Times

Vegetables roast best at 400°F. Times will vary depending on the size of cut vegetables.

Quick-cooking vegetables: (15-25 minutes): zucchini, yellow squash, bell peppers, green beans, asparagus, mushrooms, cauliflower, broccoli, tomatoes

Dense vegetables: (30-60 minutes): carrots, parsnips, turnips, rutabaga, beets, sweet potatoes, winter squash, brussels sprouts

High potassium content in white potatoes can be reduced by boiling small dices, draining, and boiling a second time in fresh water before using. Learn more at kidneycommunitykitchen.ca.



MIX

&

MATCH



There are endless options for seasoning roasted vegetables. Pair with a lean protein or tofu that matches the flavour choice, or serve with a grain or rice bowl.

Roasted Vegetables Base Recipe



This recipe makes enough roasted vegetables to refrigerate or freeze several portions for future meals. If not preparing ahead of time, half all the ingredients for a smaller serving.

9-11 cups chopped vegetables
3 tbsp olive oil
3-4 crushed garlic cloves (chopped garlic will burn)
1 tbsp Dijon mustard (adds flavour depth)
1 tsp ground pepper
¼ tsp salt, if diet allows

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Toss vegetables with rest of ingredients and spread on

two uncrowded sheet pans. Start with dense vegetables then add quicker-cooking ones when flipping halfway.

Swap pan positions, roast roots 30–45 min, softer vegetables 20–30 min. Below are some seasoning suggestions (see roasting times on page 11).

Roasting is more art than science. Vegetables should look lightly dusted, not caked. If it smells flavourful before baking, you're on track—if it only smells like oil and raw vegetables, add more seasoning. Start with these baseline amounts, then adjust to taste. Finish with pepper, lemon juice, or fresh herbs after roasting.

Spicy

Season with 1 tablespoon chipotle chili powder or regular chili powder plus ½ tsp cayenne.

LEFTOVER OPTIONS

- Toss into quesadillas or tacos with low-sodium beans, lettuce, and sour cream
- Mix into a rice or grain bowl
- Blend into a spicy soup or chili

Cheesy

Sprinkle with 2-3 tablespoons of freshly grated Parmesan cheese near the end. Pop back into the oven for a few minutes to melt. Remember, even a little bit of Parmesan can add a lot of cheese flavour.

LEFTOVER OPTIONS

- Use as a filling for baked pasta or lasagna rolls
- Stir into a frittata or omelette
- Spread on toast as a warm topping

Sweet

Gently toss in 1 tablespoon turmeric and 4 tablespoons sweet Thai chili sauce (omit mustard).

LEFTOVER OPTIONS

- Puree into a soup with ginger and homemade stock
- Fold into grain salads with dried fruit and seeds
- Use in wraps with kidney-friendly hummus and greens

Citrus

Add thin lemon slices to the pan with the vegetables. Finish with a squeeze of fresh lemon juice.

LEFTOVER OPTIONS

- Stir into lentils or dal for extra texture
- Wrap into naan or pita with yogurt sauce
- Add to coconut curry soup with rice

Curry

Gently toss with 2 tablespoons curry powder and ½ teaspoon cumin.

LEFTOVER OPTIONS

- Stir into lentils or dal for extra texture
- Wrap into naan or pita with yogurt sauce
- Add to coconut curry soup with rice

Mediterranean

Season with 2 tablespoons oregano and a splash of red wine vinegar. Prior to serving, sprinkle with 2 tablespoons of feta cheese and a squeeze of lemon.

LEFTOVER OPTIONS

- Mix into a pasta salad with olives and feta
- Layer onto a pizza or flatbread
- Toss into a warm grain bowl with tahini or tzatziki

Pro Tip: Add texture to elevate your vegetables: top with roasted seeds, chopped nuts (if allowed), or finish with Parmesan, parsley, or cracked pepper for extra flavour and colour.



Meal Prep It!

When you double or triple your roasted vegetables it makes meal prep simple throughout the week.

These four recipes are easy to adapt to your personal tastes and work well with leftover roasted vegetables that may have lost some crunch. Don't be afraid to play with flavours or ingredients.

Roast Vegetable Soup

3–4 cups leftover roasted vegetables (carrots, potatoes, bell peppers, cauliflower, sweet potato, onion, etc.)

1 tbsp olive oil

2 cloves garlic, minced

4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth

2 tbsp fresh or 2 tsp dried herbs (thyme, basil, rosemary, parsley, etc.)

½ tsp black pepper

Juice of ½ lemon or 1 tbsp bottled lemon juice

Optional add-ins

½ cup cooked white beans (low-sodium, rinsed well) for extra protein

Chopped spinach or kale, stirred in at the end.

In a large pot, heat olive oil over medium. Add garlic and sauté 1–2 minutes.

Add roasted vegetables and herbs. Stir for 2–3 minutes to rewarm and release aroma.

Pour in broth and bring to a simmer. Cook for 10–15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Ladle out half the soup into a bowl and reserve. Blend remaining soup with an immersion stick or transfer to a blender in batches.

Return to pot along with reserved soup. Add optional beans or greens if using.

Adjust seasoning with pepper and a splash of lemon juice (no need for added salt). Serve with a quick drizzle of olive oil or a sprinkle of roasted pumpkin seeds.

Makes 4 servings.

Pro Tip: Store leftover vegetables in airtight containers and add a splash of lemon juice or olive oil when reheating to keep them moist.

Veggie Fritters

Vegetable fritters make a great lunch or easy, light dinner paired with a salad.

2 cups leftover roasted vegetables (finely chopped or lightly mashed — carrots, cauliflower zucchini, broccoli, peppers, sweet potato, etc.)

1 egg

½ cup unsalted panko or plain breadcrumbs

2 tbsp fresh parsley or chives, chopped

½ tsp black pepper

1–2 tbsp flour

olive oil spray or 1–2 tsp olive oil for frying

Chop or mash roasted vegetables.

In a bowl, mix mashed vegetables with egg, breadcrumbs, herbs, pepper, and flour until it forms a thick mixture.

If too wet add more breadcrumbs or if too dry add a splash of water.

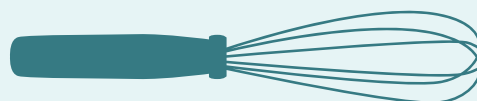
Shape into patties, about 2 tbsp of mixture each.

Heat a non-stick skillet over medium heat and brush with olive oil.

Cook fritters 3–4 min per side until golden and crisp.

Serve warm with a dollop of plain Greek yogurt, unsalted tzatziki, or a squeeze of lemon.

Makes 8 fritters.



3



Pro Tip: Layer flavours by combining fresh herbs with a warm spice and a touch of zest at the end.

Basic Dinner Frittata

Frittatas are quick, protein-rich, and flexible, making them a great dinner alternative. Once you learn the basics you can experiment with whatever produce and spices you have at home, or try one of the flavour pairings below.

1 ½ cups leftover roasted vegetables (zucchini, sweet potatoes, peppers, onions, broccoli, etc.)
6 large eggs
¼ cup low-fat milk
1 tbsp olive oil
2 tbsp fresh parsley or chives, chopped
½ tsp black pepper
Optional: 2 tbsp low-sodium feta or a sprinkle of parmesan (if allowed in diet)

Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).

Lightly oil an oven-safe skillet. Warm roasted

vegetables in the skillet for 2–3 minutes.

In a bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, herbs, and pepper. Pour egg mixture over the vegetables in the skillet. Stir gently to distribute.

Cook on the stove over medium heat for 3 minutes or until the edges start to set.

Transfer skillet to oven and bake 10–12 minutes, or until the frittata is puffed and set in the center.

Let cool slightly before slicing into wedges. Serve warm or at room temperature with a side salad.

Frittata Vegetable and Flavour Pairings

Mediterranean (oregano, thyme, parsley, lemon zest) pairs well with zucchini, peppers, or spinach.

Smoky Paprika Blend (smoked paprika, black pepper, garlic powder, fresh chives) gives depth and a hint of “smokiness” without added bacon and pairs well with root vegetables,

broccoli, and cauliflower.

Bright Citrus (fresh dill or basil, lemon zest, and a little lightly crushed coriander or fennel seed) works great with asparagus, broccoli, and peas.

Warm and Earthy (turmeric, cumin, fresh cilantro, black pepper) adds

a golden colour with a gentle spice and works well with potatoes and cauliflower.

Garden Blend (fresh chives, tarragon or basil, black pepper, sprinkle of nutritional yeast) tastes fresh and slightly cheesy—perfect with mushrooms and leeks.

Roast Vegetable Protein Bowl

Base: 1–1 ½ cups cooked of either:

White rice

Pearl couscous (Israeli couscous)

Quinoa (if potassium or phosphorus are not restricted)

Bulgur (lower potassium than quinoa)

Veggies (1–2 cups)

Leftover roasted vegetables (zucchini, bell peppers, cauliflower, carrots, onions, etc.)

Protein (choose 1)

Grilled chicken, sliced (skinless, unsalted)

Hard-boiled egg, sliced or poached egg

White beans or chickpeas (rinsed well to lower sodium and phosphorus)

Tofu (lightly pan-seared or baked)

Toppings (various combinations)

Fresh herbs (parsley, cilantro, basil, dill)

Cucumber slices, kale, or shredded lettuce for crunch

Lemon wedges for brightness

A spoonful of Greek yogurt, hummus, or tzatziki (check for phosphorus)

Dressing (choose 1 combination)

Olive oil, lemon juice, black pepper

Tahini, water, garlic, lemon (thin and drizzle)

Apple cider vinegar, olive oil, chopped herbs

Gently mix the base and vegetables (mix in beans if using them), and layer protein on top. Sprinkle with toppings and drizzle with dressing.

Choose Your Own Adventure

Start with this simple roast vegetable bowl to ease into kidney-friendly cooking without needing a recipe. As you discover new flavour combinations, adapt them to your personal kidney dietary needs and bring variety and joy back to the kitchen.



Pro Tip: Choose end-of-dish finishings that add contrast—something fresh (herbs, cucumber, radish), something crunchy (crumbled rice cake, low-sodium croutons, unsalted seeds), something creamy (tahini dressing, olive oil, unsalted ricotta), and something bright to lift the flavours (lemon juice, vinegar, low-salt quick-pickled onion).



Adding Protein

Chicken and Vegetable Roasting Formula

1. Choose Cut

Boneless, skinless breasts: 20–25 min
Bone-in thighs or drumsticks: 35–45 min
Leg quarters or bone-in breasts: 45–55 min

2. Select Vegetables

Hearty vegetables: 5-25 min before chicken, depending on cut
Quick-cooking vegetables: during last 20 minutes (see page 11 for specific vegetable roasting times)

3. Season

Use your choice of seasoning profile or a basic mix of olive oil, pepper, garlic powder, paprika, and rosemary.

4. Cook

Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C). Line a sheet pan and add seasoned hearty vegetables first. Add chicken at specified time and add quick vegetables last. Roast until chicken hits 165°F (74°C) and vegetables are tender.

5. Finishing Touches

Finish with a splash of lemon juice, fresh herbs (parsley, basil, dill), parmesan, or drizzle with kidney-friendly sauce.

Fish and Vegetable Roasting Formula

1. Choose Fish

Thin fillets (tilapia, flounder, sole): 10–12 min
Medium fillets (salmon, cod, haddock, trout): 12–15 min

2. Select Vegetables

Hearty vegetables: 20–25 min before fish
Quick-cooking vegetables: same time as fish

3. Season

Season fish with olive oil, lemon, herbs, or a low sodium spice rub.

4. Cook

Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C). Toss hearty vegetables with olive oil and roast until partially tender (see page 11 for specific vegetable roasting times). Add quick-cook vegetables and place fish on top or beside and roast until opaque and flakes easily.

5. Finishings Touches

Finish with fresh lemon juice, parsley, or a drizzle of herbed yogurt or tahini sauce (see pro tip on page 17 for more ideas).



Best Flavour: Cook protein and vegetables together so juices mingle, but watch for sogginess.

Best Texture: Roast on separate pans for crisp edges and caramelization.

Compromise: Keep protein and high-water veggies in separate sections to reduce steaming and space well.

Side by Side

Insights From a Care Partner



Contributor: Andrea Rudy

Ryan and Susan at BC Children's Hospital (2016)

Behind every kidney patient is often a quiet hero, or an entire family, sharing the weight of appointments, lifestyle changes, and the daily ups and downs of chronic illness. Their stories rarely take the spotlight, yet they reveal the heart of what it means to walk alongside someone through treatment. Listening to care partners in their own words offers a deeper understanding of what kidney care truly looks like beyond the clinic walls.

In 2016, Susan and Keith Firman's son, Ryan, was diagnosed with kidney disease at the young age of 16. In that moment, life changed for the entire family. Typical parental worries about school grades and team tryouts for Ryan and his younger brother, Adam, changed to lab results, medications, and monthly trips from Kamloops to BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver. And for the past nine years, his family has been by his side sharing in the journey.

In early 2025, Ryan received an urgent call necessitating immediate dialysis treatment, and shortly after, the news that his best chance was

a kidney transplant from a living donor. That summer, Ryan, his parents Susan and Keith, and his brother Adan travelled from their home in Kamloops to Vancouver where he received that life-saving transplant after an exhaustive search for a donor.

KM: Susan, thank you so much for speaking with us today. Can you tell us what this experience has been like for you, both as a mother and a care partner? Before Ryan's diagnosis, what was life like?

Susan: Ryan had always been an active teen—playing competitive basketball and soccer, and skiing every winter. Between him and Adam

plus the demands of our family business, my husband, Keith, and I were constantly on the move. In the weeks before his diagnosis, Ryan had started experiencing heart palpitations, and we'd been in and out of doctors' offices trying to understand what was going on.

KM: What can you tell us about the day when you first heard of Ryan's diagnosis and the days after?

Susan: I remember I was standing in Ryan's bedroom when we received the call. The doctor said, "We have concerns about Ryan's kidneys. They are only functioning at 25 percent. We need to get you down to BC Children's Hospital." In my mind I

"just take one day at a time, **ONE FOOT IN FRONT OF THE OTHER.**"

We never let it consume our lives. We didn't want to live in constant fear, saying *we can't do this* or *we can't do that*. We took it one step at a time—whether it was six months, six years, or sixty years, all we could do was make sure Ryan stayed as healthy as possible.



was thinking, that's just not possible. I was in shock. Even after hanging up, I still couldn't process what I heard. To look at Ryan you would have no idea he had kidney disease. He was young, fit, athletic. How could this be happening?

Eventually we ended up at BC Children's where he had a biopsy, after which we were told that he would need a transplant at some point.

KM: How did life change for you from mother to both mother and care partner?

Susan: Life definitely changed. We had to travel from Kamloops to Vancouver once a month, with both Keith and I taking time off work. But we would bring his brother, Adam, and make a family weekend out of it so Ryan wouldn't feel bad. We tried to make it feel as normal as possible for the whole family.

There were more appointments, more bloodwork—it became clear this was something we had to actively manage. We followed all the advice from the Children's Hospital, then transitioned his care from Vancouver to Kelowna and eventually to Kamloops as he got older.

We never let it consume our lives. We didn't want to live in constant fear, saying "we can't do this" or "we can't do that." We took it one step at a time—whether it was six months, six years, or sixty years, we knew it was out of our control. All we could do was make sure Ryan stayed as healthy as possible by eating well and staying active.

KM: We often hear about the connection between kidney disease and mental health. Was this something that concerned you? If so, how did your family approach it, and is there anything, big or small, that stands out in your experience?

Susan: Maintaining a sense of normality was key for us. We kept our daily routines the same and avoided any "poor me" mindset—it was essential for our mental health.

During our visits to BC Children's Hospital, Ryan saw other kids facing even tougher challenges, and that gave him perspective. He'd say, "If they can deal with that, I can deal with this." We didn't want depression to take hold, so our attitude was always, *we'll figure it out*.

We also encouraged Ryan's independence—getting his driver's license, having some autonomy—because that was important for his confidence and mental wellbeing as a teenager. As his mom, I wanted him to build the life skills every teenager needs. He had his doctor's contact information in Kamloops and knew he could reach out to her directly if he needed to, without my involvement, but he always knew I was there for him whenever he needed me.

Once he aged out of BC Children's Hospital, our relationship shifted. We became more of a team, working together instead of me directing everything. Through it all, Ryan has handled everything like a champ. We've all had our good and bad days, but his optimism has been our anchor.

KM: There's so much to manage when living with kidney disease at any age. How does everyone work together to provide ongoing physical, emotional, and practical support?

Susan: We just take one day at a time, one foot in front of the other, and we do whatever we can to help him. Whether that's reminding him to drink X amount of water, make sure he's taking his medication. I know Ryan is 25 now, but I still can't help asking him, did you do this, did you do that, what about this, what about that, right?

He stayed active with sports up until the last couple of years when things became more difficult. Maintaining a kidney-friendly diet is also key. My thought has always been, we are going to keep these kidneys as healthy as possible for as long as needed.

At the end of the day, it comes down to this question: *Did we do everything we could to keep him healthy?* If the answer is yes, then we'll deal with whatever comes next.

KM: Can you share a time when things felt especially hard? And what got you through it?

Susan: There were times when I wonder if it was my fault. As a mother, we second guess what we could have done differently, if it was something that happened when I was pregnant. Those moments of self-doubt and feeling bad were hard. But I had my own support system.

My husband, Keith, was a huge factor in helping me get through those moments. He gave me a reality check and helped keep my positivity up.

Plus, I had another son to think about. Having your own support system, if it's a friend or family member to lean on, is crucial.

The day hope became real

KM: This year was a real turning point when you found out Ryan needed a transplant urgently. It was a whole new learning process, but he found a match and has had his transplant.

Susan: I'm so excited for him. I've always said this would help him get his life back. He doesn't have to do dialysis anymore, and now he can just get on to making plans, thinking about the future, and getting back to being a young man and having some fun in his life, right? I think that's really important for him.

KM: Tell us more about that process. Your family members were tested, but unfortunately no one was a match for Ryan. But there was a living donor out there for him.

Susan: This has absolutely saved his life. Unfortunately, I wasn't a donor

match for him, and neither was my husband. We were both shocked and upset when we discovered that. It is amazing, the gift that he's been given from an initially anonymous donor. I can't say thank you enough.

KM: What is your advice to other care partners in a similar situation?

Susan: If you're helping a loved one search for a living donor, don't be afraid to share your story. Ryan was hesitant at first, and I gave him the space to sit with those feelings. Don't push—but be supportive and patient while they process it.

It takes vulnerability to put your story and information out there, but that openness can make all the difference. There truly are good people in the world who want to help. It was hard to believe that in the beginning, but it's true—it happened for us. Ryan found his donor because we were willing to share.

My biggest piece of advice is: don't lose hope. There will be low points along the way, but that's when you pick up the torch and keep going for your loved one. Hope really does carry you through.

KM: That's another part of being a care partner that many people may not think about—the advocacy and communications process when needing a transplant.

Susan: Exactly. Even as we've passed that stage, we are still going to continue to push the message of being tested and help increase awareness of living donation. When people hear that someone is exploring it, they often ask questions, learn more, and sometimes consider it themselves. It normalizes a conversation that can be life-changing for others down the road.

KM: We love hearing that you're keeping the torch burning and continuing the mission of helping other kidney patients find their match. Tell us a bit more about the Facebook page you created for this process.

Susan: We created a page to share Ryan's situation, and other people can also join and post their own situations. We have over 400 members on that page now, so, we're hoping to continue to spread the word about kidney awareness.

One of the things I thought that was really important to mention is that there were a lot of people who came forward. We were fortunate with Ryan; a lot of people were filling out paperwork to try to become a donor. And I would just really highly encourage people to maybe continue with that process.

KM: From sharing your story, as you said, multiple living donors came to the table and said, 'I want to see if I'm a match', spreading awareness about living organ donation, which gets the conversation going. People who weren't a match for Ryan might be a match for someone else.

Susan: Exactly! It can create a domino effect. I think it's really important to try to continue to do that because one in ten Canadians are affected by kidney disease. So it's far more common than we think.

KM: What do you want others to know about being a care partner that they might not see from the outside?

Susan: Just do what needs to be done.

There is no one way to do things, and it has to work for you—everyone's situation is different.

Connecting with others who are at a similar stage in the journey and reaching out are important. Through the Kidney Wellness Hub I found some great peer support groups. On one Zoom call, there were people

left to right: Adam, Keith, Susan and Ryan at the June 2025 Kidney Walk





Ryan before surgery, August, 2025

from all over British Columbia—and even some from the East Coast—all sharing advice and their own experiences. The Foundation was a big help these last couple of years. They offered online classes for finding a donor and support on going through the paperwork.

I would suggest to others in a similar situation to give their loved one the space to feel ready to share. Once you start, you have to be prepared to be vulnerable and get it out there.

Who is Ryan? Why is he going through this? What is his story? When he didn't have the strength to speak up, I took on that role. We started the Facebook group where we posted every single day. We were an open book, would answer any questions at all times, which was the least we could do for those considering being tested to be an organ match. We posted every single day and 88 days later we had a match.

KM: As Ryan's mom, you've talked about how happy you are that he's getting a little bit of his life back. For you personally, what does that mean? How do you think life will feel for you, day to day, now that he's on this new path?

Susan: Yeah, it's still emotional, to be really honest with you. Because we've been going through this for

almost ten years now, but we're on the other side of it now! I'm just super thankful that he had this opportunity—that a living donor came forward to help him.

KM: On a final note, what gives you hope as you and your family move forward?

Susan: Our community. The way friends, neighbours, and even local media stepped up has been incredible. Everyone helped share our story and push the message out there. Our mission became not just about Ryan, but about helping others, too. Even if someone wasn't a match for him, maybe they could be for someone else. There are over 500 people in BC waiting for a kidney, and every story shared can make a difference.

I can't just walk away now that Ryan has his new kidney. So many people reached out to help, and we want to honour that by keeping the message alive. Ryan is living a full, healthy life with his new kidney, and that gives us hope and purpose to keep going for others still waiting.

KM: Susan, thank you for speaking with us today. As you point out it takes not only courage but also vulnerability for people to share their story. But in the sharing comes hope.

Susan: Absolutely.

Tips for New Care Partners

- 1. Learn about kidney disease.** Understanding your loved one's condition helps you anticipate needs, support treatment decisions, and reduce anxiety.
- 2. Communicate openly.** Check in often, listen fully, and encourage honest discussions with healthcare providers.
- 3. Stay organized.** Keep track of medications, appointments, and test results in one place—digital or paper.
- 4. Encourage healthy routines.** Support balanced meals, regular activity, and rest. Join them in walks or meal planning to make it easier and more positive.
- 5. Practice self-care.** Take breaks, reach out for support, and look after your own emotional and physical health.
- 6. Build a support network.** Connect with other care partners or local Kidney Foundation programs to share experiences and learn from others.



Keith, Susan, Adam, and Ryan, Kamloops Blazers game (2024)

COOKING with **CARE**

When AI Gets Kidney Diets Wrong

Contributors: Andrea Rudy and John Vardalos, J5 Design



Artificial intelligence (AI) is changing the way people look for information, including recipes for special diets like those needed in kidney disease. While AI can generate quick ideas, there are important limitations and risks that patients and care partners should be aware of before relying on it for guidance.

Inaccurate or Generic Nutrition Information

AI-generated recipes may not always reflect the dietary requirements of people with kidney disease, and suggestions may not consider specific or unique nutritional needs. Because AI tools pull from broad sources, they can produce recipes that sound healthy in general but aren't always kidney-safe in practice.

Lack of Personalization

Kidney diets are highly individualized. A person on dialysis may have different restrictions than someone with early-stage chronic kidney disease. AI cannot take into account a patient's lab values, stage of disease, or fluid restrictions. This "one-size-fits-all" approach can give a false sense of security.

Limited Context and Oversight

AI doesn't know your full health picture, medications, or comorbidities. It may not take drug–nutrient interactions into account, which can lead to inaccurate guidance and potential health risks. Without professional oversight, AI-generated meal ideas may unintentionally cause harm.

Overconfidence in Technology

Because AI provides information in a confident, natural-sounding tone, people may assume the recommendations are safe or

medically approved. This can lead to misplaced trust and fewer conversations with registered dietitians trained to provide evidence-based and individualized advice.

Missed Opportunities for Education

Working with a dietitian provides more than just recipes. Patients learn skills like reading food labels, balancing portion sizes, and finding practical substitutes—all essential for long-term success. AI lacks the human touch and teaching component that helps patients truly understand their diet.

AI can transform healthcare, but only when it's grounded in the lived experience and realities of clinicians, patients and family caregivers. The most responsible systems are designed with people at the centre and validated with the same rigor and evidence expected of any other care-related intervention.

John Vardalos
CEO, jfive.com

Using AI can be a fun way to spark ideas in the kitchen, but it should never replace professional dietary guidance. For kidney patients, certain dietary changes can have an impact on health. The safest approach is to use AI recipes only as inspiration, then review them with a registered dietitian or healthcare provider before adding them to your meal plan.

How to Safely Use AI for Recipe Inspiration

- Use AI for ideas, not instructions. Think of recipes as a starting point to spark creativity.
- Check ingredients carefully. Look out for high-potassium, high-phosphorus, or high-sodium foods.
- Watch portion sizes. Even safe foods can become unsafe in large amounts.
- Cross-check with reliable sources. Compare recipes to trusted kidney diet resources.
- Talk to your dietitian. Bring new recipe ideas to your healthcare team for review.

You can also use a trusted resource for every stage of kidney disease like kidneycommunitykitchen.ca, where you will find reliable, stage-specific diet guidance, detailed recipes, and practical meal-planning tools.

Did you know?

AI's accuracy depends on the quality and reliability of its training data, which can often be flawed or unverified on the internet.

Pro Tip: Recognize oversimplification. Complicated issues like kidney disease rarely have simple, one size-fits-all answers. If the explanation feels too elementary, it may be leaving out important nuance.

A person is shown in profile, meditating in a lotus position outdoors. The person is wearing a grey long-sleeved shirt. Their hands are in the Anjali mudra (prayer position) with fingers pointing upwards. The background is a soft-focus sunset or sunrise scene with warm orange and yellow light filtering through trees. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Mindful Meditation

**A FEW MINUTES A DAY—ANYWHERE,
ANYTIME—CAN REDUCE ANXIETY,
ENHANCE CLARITY, AND RESTORE INNER
BALANCE.**

Contributor: Brenda Brown, Meditation and Yoga Instructor

Some of the Many Benefits



ENHANCE MOOD



IMPROVE MEMORY



SLEEP WELL



BRING HARMONY TO YOUR LIFE



INCREASES ENERGY



WEIGHT LOSS



REGULATES HEART RATE



REDUCES STRESS



MORE CREATIVITY

Meditation is a proven mind-body practice that offers emotional and physical benefits for individuals with chronic kidney disease (CKD). While it does not reverse kidney damage, it helps manage stress, anxiety, high blood pressure, pain, and depression—common challenges for those with CKD or undergoing dialysis. Meditation also supports treatment adherence by improving mental clarity and motivation.

Types of Meditation Suitable for Kidney Patients

Mindfulness Meditation (Breath Awareness)

How: Sit quietly and focus on your breath. When thoughts arise and distract you, gently return your awareness to your breathing. Focus on each inhale and exhale, deepening with each breath. Start with 5–10 minutes daily.

Why: Reduces anxiety and improves emotional regulation.

Body Scan Meditation

How: Lie down or recline comfortably. Move your attention slowly from the bottom of your feet to the top of your heart, relaxing

each area as you inhale and exhale.

Why: Reduces tension and pain, especially on fatigued days or after dialysis, and improves sleep.

Loving-Kindness Meditation (Metta)

How: Silently repeat phrases such as “May I be safe, may I be healthy, may I be kind,” and then extend these wishes to others, including those for whom it may be difficult to feel kindness.

Why: Helps reduce depression, which is prevalent among CKD patients.

Guided Meditation

How: Use an audio or video resource where a teacher leads you through calming visualizations or breathwork.

Why: Helpful for beginners or those experiencing fatigue and prefer passive practice.

Mantra Meditation

How: Silently repeat a soothing word or phrase (“Peace,” “Om,” “Let go” or “Relax”).

Why: Calms the mind and improves focus, especially during dialysis.

Kidney patients can benefit from meditating at several points throughout the day. Practicing before dialysis can help reduce pre-session anxiety, while meditating afterward supports recovery and relaxation. It's also helpful before bedtime to promote better rest, or at any moment when stress or pain arises.



At your desk

On your bed



In your living room

Pro Tip: Consistency matters more than duration. A few minutes daily is more effective than occasional long sessions. Forcing long sessions may lead to frustration and wandering thoughts.

Meditation

for Beginners Guide

Meditation offers a gentle yet powerful way to enhance wellbeing for kidney patients. By incorporating even a few minutes of daily practice, individuals can experience reduced stress, improved emotional resilience, better sleep, and increased motivation. With no special tools required, meditation is an accessible and effective complement to medical treatment, empowering patients to take an active role in their healing journey.

1
Find a Comfortable Spot

Sit in a chair, on a cushion, or lie down. Release your shoulders down your back, away from your ears, and straighten your back to a point of comfort and relaxation. Rest your hands on your lap or by your side.

4
Begin Small

Start with just 2–5 minutes a day. Gradually increase the time as it feels comfortable.

2
Start With Your Breath

Close your eyes or soften your gaze. Breathe slowly in through your nose and out through your mouth. Notice the natural rhythm of your breath.

5
Try Simple Variations

Begin with a body scan, noticing sensations from head to toe. Try a calming mantra such as “peace” or “I feel joy,” or use a gratitude reflection by thinking of one thing for which you’re thankful.

3
Focus Your Attention

When your mind wanders (and it will!), gently bring it back to your breath. Try silently saying “in” as you inhale and “out” as you exhale. You can also count your breaths to remain focused.

6
Be Patient With Yourself

Meditation isn’t about emptying your mind—it’s about noticing thoughts and letting them pass without judgement.

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