

My Treatment: Albumin

Albumin is the most common type of protein found in the blood. It provides the body with the protein needed to maintain body growth and repair tissues. Albumin level measures whether you are getting enough nutrients. It is important to maintain >3.8 gm/dl for good results and to reduce problems. The amount and type of protein you eat is very important as well, and your dietitian will talk with you about what you need to do.

What Does Albumin Do?

Albumin does many things in the body, including:

- Building, repairing, and keeping up body tissues
- Pulling extra fluid from swollen tissues back into the blood, where it can be removed by the dialyzer
- Making enzymes and hormones
- Transporting nutrients
- Supporting muscle contraction
- Assisting in blood clotting
- Being part of antibodies

What Causes Low Albumin?

- The body's need for more protein because of stress caused by illness, infection, inflammation, and surgery
- Increased urinary protein loss because of a condition known as nephrotic syndrome
- Loss of protein during peritoneal dialysis (PD) exchanges
- Decreased appetite
 - Caused by fullness and glucose absorption from dialysis solution
 - Due to different medical conditions like cancer or depression
- Cost of high protein foods

- Trouble chewing, swallowing or dental problems
- Food allergies
- Poor protein absorption from the Gastro Intestinal (GI) tract
- Angiography (x-ray of blood vessels)

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Low Albumin?

- Swelling
- Difficulty fighting infection
- Tiredness
- Poor wound healing
- Muscle weakness
- White nail syndrome

What Are Some Ways to Improve Albumin Levels?

Improving albumin is more than eating protein; other things may also affect your albumin level. What You can do:

- Get adequate dialysis by
 - Going to every dialysis treatment
 - Staying your full treatment time
- Eat enough protein
 - Add protein shake or powders to your diet
- See your dentist regularly
- Talk to your dietitian

What Can Staff Do?

- Assess and monitor you for:
 - Dialysis adequacy
 - Signs and symptoms of infection
 - Vascular access problems
 - Catheter exit site problems
 - Dental problems
 - Appetite
 - Depression
- Staff may recommend:
 - Quick treatment for infections and inflammation
 - Going to the dentist
 - Nutritional supplements (oral or Intravenous)
 - Eating small meals more often
 - Medication to increase your appetite

My Questions

Ask Your Care Team:

- Am I getting enough dialysis?
- What can I do to improve my albumin level?
- How much protein do I need to eat?
- What if I do not eat or like meat?
- Does my insurance cover protein supplement?

Source: NEPHROLOGY NURSING JOURNAL September-October 2004 Vol. 31, No. 5
http://www.kidney.org/professionals/kdoqi/guidelines_updates/nut_a03.html

This material was prepared and distributed by Qsource ESRD Networks, under contract with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (contract numbers HHSM-500-2016-00010C and HHSM-500-2016-00012C). The contents presented do not necessarily reflect CMS policy. 19.Q-ESRD.05.030

