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Very-low-protein diet delays dialysis in elderly

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - In elderly non-diabetic people with failing kidneys, a supplemented very-low-protein diet can be safely used to postpone the start of dialysis, according to a report from Italy.

"Imagining that 25 percent of elderly patients ... could be treated with this diet, a tremendous amount of money can be saved," Dr. Giuliano Brunori, from Spedali Civili di Brescia, told Reuters Health.

Brunori and his colleagues investigated the safety and efficacy of a very-low-protein diet in decreasing the symptoms of kidney failure and postponing the start of dialysis in patients 70 years of age or older with chronic kidney disease that had progressed to the point where they would normally start dialysis.

The researchers assigned 56 patients to the diet, and another 56 were started on dialysis.

The intervention diet was vegan-based, with no more than 0.3 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight daily, but supplemented with essential amino acids and vitamins.

Over the next two years, 40 of the very-low-protein diet-treated patients had to begin dialysis therapy, but it was delayed by an average of 9.8 months after beginning the diet, the authors report in the American Journal of Kidney Diseases.

One-year survival rates did not differ significantly between the dialysis and diet groups, at 83.7 percent and 87.3 percent, respectively, the results indicate.


The very-low-protein-diet group had significantly fewer hospitalizations and days of hospitalization than did the dialysis group, the researchers note, even after adjustment for

differences in age.

In normal elderly kidney patients without a lot of other health problems, "the diet does not induce malnutrition and is not life-threatening," Brunori said. "Hospitalization is lower and patients' and families' burdens can be reduced."

"Furthermore," Brunori added, "we want to verify the feasibility of this diet in patients younger than 70."

SOURCE: American Journal of Kidney Diseases, May 2007.

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