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American Kidney Fund®
FIGHTING ON ALL FRONTS

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AKF IN ACTION

Fighting kidney disease and helping people live healthier lives.

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AKF resources help patients navigate transplant evaluation, surgery and recovery

AKF published a series of resources for patients and their loved ones that explain the complex kidney transplant process, including evaluation, waitlist and recovery, follow-up care and maintaining kidney health after receiving a transplant.

The resources provide step-by-step support and are part of AKF's continuing work to improve education and understanding of kidney transplants. They include:

- **Your Guide to Life After Transplant**, a post-transplant downloadable guide, available in English and Spanish. This guide aims to help people understand what to expect after receiving a kidney transplant and to help them feel prepared and supported. To download the guide, visit kidneyfund.org/life-after-transplant-guide.

- **"Step Forward: The Road to Kidney Transplant and Beyond,"** an interactive e-learning course that is part of AKF's online education hub, the Kidney Education Corner. Through this course, participants can use an interactive roadmap to explore different parts of the transplant journey including:

- How to obtain a referral and what to expect during a transplant evaluation
- Staying active on the waitlist
- What to expect during transplant surgery
- Managing transplant recovery and maintaining kidney health

Visit kidneyfund.org/step-forward-transplant to take the Step Forward course.

Other resources include a Kidney Action Week® session, "Beyond the Transplant: Navigating Life After a Kidney Transplant," sponsored by argenx. That session can be viewed at kidneyfund.org/beyond-the-transplant.

Support for these transplant resources is provided by argenx and Biogen.

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Why community matters for kidney disease and mental health

When AKF Ambassador and Kidney Health Coach® Lupita Ayala was diagnosed with kidney disease in 2018, she wasn't particularly concerned. At the time, she was only 25 years old and had little to no knowledge of kidney disease.

"No one in my family has ever had any type of kidney disease or kidney issues or had to be on dialysis," Lupita said. "I kind of just brushed it off and said 'Okay, it's something I'm going to take medicine for and it's going to go away.'"

But it didn't go away, Lupita added. Although Lupita was able to avoid dialysis for the first two years following her diagnosis, she had to begin in-center dialysis in 2021. When she started, she didn't have any coping mechanisms to deal with the stress of the situation. "I kept telling myself, 'You can do it,'" Lupita said. "[However], it just got to the point where I couldn't."

Struggling with anxiety and depression, Lupita didn't know how to handle what she was feeling. "I didn't have an outlet [to deal with it]," she said. "I didn't have anybody to talk to, and I didn't know how to get those emotions out. I didn't want to be a burden on my family."

"I'm from Mexico," Lupita said. "Most of the time, in my community and in my family, it was like, 'Everything happens for a reason, and you just take it and go with it and don't think about it. If it makes you sad, just move on.'"

However, Lupita reached a point where she could no longer avoid seeking help, as she was engaging in binge eating, experiencing anxiety attacks and telling her husband that she wanted to give up and stop treatment altogether. After that revelation, she said her husband was a big advocate for her seeking therapy. It was this support that gave Lupita the push she needed to get help.

To her surprise, Lupita's family was also supportive. "[My mom] was pretty understanding, but I think it's because she had seen everything that I had gone through and how I was reacting to it," she said.

Lupita said therapy has been very helpful for her, along with medicine and engaging in activities she enjoys, such as hiking and being outdoors. "Being outside in nature helps me a lot," she said. "Anytime I feel anxiety or depression coming on, I'm like, 'Okay, time to go for a walk.'"

When asked what she would tell people who struggle emotionally with having kidney disease but are afraid of being judged about asking for help, Lupita cited advice that her husband gave her.

"[He said] 'It doesn't matter what you do, someone will always judge you, so do what makes you happy and feel



okay," she said. "I say that to myself every day because it's true. You're not going to make everybody in life happy, so just concentrate on making yourself happy and [ensuring] that you have what you want and need to be okay."

Lupita also emphasized that people struggling with kidney disease and mental health issues are not alone. "There are so many of us out there that go through the same thing," she said. "I feel like social media is such a big platform and there are so many people on social media who are open [about their struggles]. Find that community online or in person that is going through the same thing as you and lean on them."

For more information on how kidney disease can impact your mental health and how you can reach out for support, visit [kidneyfund.org/mental-health](https://www.kidneyfund.org/mental-health).

Visit [kidneyfund.org/mental-health-matters](https://www.kidneyfund.org/mental-health-matters) to watch the session Lupita took part in during AKF's 'Dialysis at Home' event last year, 'Your Mental Health Matters: Recognizing Your Needs and Finding Support.'

You can listen to/watch Lupita on season 3, episode 3 of AKF's podcast, The Kidney Collective™, by visiting [kidneyfund.org/podcast](https://www.kidneyfund.org/podcast) or subscribing to The Kidney Collective wherever you listen to podcasts. This season of the podcast takes a closer look at the different ways kidney disease can impact mental health.

Coming in 2027: AKF's new Grants Management System platform

A significant update to improve AKF's Grants Management System (GMS) is coming next year, and AKF wants to ensure you have ample time to prepare.

This online portal will be more automated, streamlined and modernized for a better user experience, helping to improve the way AKF works with patients and renal professionals to provide charitable assistance through its Health Insurance Premium Program and other financial assistance programs.

As the launch of the new portal gets closer, AKF will continue to communicate with GMS users about what to expect and what you need to do to make the switch as seamless as possible.

As preliminary steps, you should:

- **Ensure you have an email address in your current profile.** Email addresses will be used for account verification and important communications. It will not be possible to have an account in the new system without a valid email address. Any patient who is currently using GMS and does not have an email address will need to establish an email address before launch. If you don't have an email, please create one using a free email address service.
- **Confirm other personal contact information,** including a phone number and mailing address, to ensure no mailing delays in receipt of your grants.

There will be no disruption in service during the transition period to the new system, which will deliver an improved experience for grant recipients and renal professionals, allowing AKF staff to better serve you.

AKF will provide regular updates in this newsletter and through GMS messaging as the launch date approaches (estimated to be in the first half of 2027).

How to contact AKF's Grant Services:

Please do not send messages, voicemails or emails to other departments to request a call back; instead, use the communication methods listed below:

By phone: Call us at **(800) 795-3226** Monday–Thursday from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m ET to speak with a live representative.

GMS Assist: Visit GMSassist.com to schedule a phone appointment for a day and time that is convenient for you. All times available are in ET.

Through GMS: Message us through your GMS account at gms.KidneyFund.org.

Online: Visit KidneyFund.org to learn more about AKF's financial assistance programs, or email us at registration@kidneyfund.org if you are having issues registering on GMS.



kidneyactionweek
FUTURE OF KIDNEY CARE

AKF's Kidney Action Week: Future of Kidney Care event addresses the latest in kidney care and what lies ahead

On Sept. 8-10, AKF hosted Kidney Action Week®: Future of Kidney Care, a virtual conference focused on emerging research and treatment advances. Under the theme "Unpacking the latest in kidney care: from understanding your cause to innovations," each day of the event featured different topics:

- **Day 1:** Deeper dive on causes and conditions
- **Day 2:** Clinical trials and advancements
- **Day 3:** Technology and emerging trends in kidney care

If you didn't get a chance to attend or want to re-watch any sessions, visit AKF's YouTube page at kidneyfund.org/fall-kaw-2026.

Be sure to join our spring Kidney Action Week: Kidney Care Essentials event in March 2027, which will also include sessions on understanding kidney disease—from diagnosis to management to treatment!

Our Fall Kidney Action Week is supported by U.S. Renal Care and Biogen.

kidney
action
week®

FUTURE OF
KIDNEY CARE

The gut-kidney connection: What you should know

The gut microbiome is the community of bacteria and other microorganisms that live in your digestive system. These microorganisms help break down parts of food, interact with your immune system and support the lining of your intestines.

Your gut and kidneys also affect one another. Researchers call this relationship the "gut-kidney axis."

People with chronic kidney disease (CKD), including those in kidney failure, may experience changes in the types and activity of microorganisms in their intestines. This imbalance is called dysbiosis, which can change the normal function of your gut and weaken the lining of your intestines. When kidney function is reduced, waste products from the normal digestion of food build up in your body and can change the balance of bacteria living in your gut. "Good" bacteria decrease while "bad" bacteria increase, leading to dysbiosis. Changes in what you eat and certain medicines can make this imbalance even worse.

In addition, an unhealthy gut can weaken the lining of your intestines, allowing harmful substances, including uremic toxins—which are normally removed by the kidneys—and inflammatory molecules to "leak" into your bloodstream. Damaged kidneys are not able to filter these waste materials as effectively. And for those already on dialysis, the most common dialysis methods are often not able to effectively remove all toxins, which can continue to build up. This may contribute to fatigue, chronic inflammation, bloating, gas, nausea and reduced quality of life.

Researchers are studying ways to support a healthier gut as part of kidney care. While more research is needed, maintaining a healthier gut may help strengthen the intestinal barrier and support overall health and wellbeing.

A healthy gut is part of healthy kidney care

Some ways to support gut health include:

- **Follow a kidney-friendly eating plan.** Work with your doctor and dietitian to create a personalized plan.
- **Eat foods with fiber**, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes. Fiber helps nourish beneficial gut bacteria.
- **Stay physically active.** Regular exercise like walking or biking supports digestion and a healthier gut microbiome.
- **Ask your healthcare team about whether probiotics**, such as one specially formulated for kidney health, are appropriate and safe for your stage of CKD.

The gut-kidney connection is changing the way researchers think about managing kidney disease. While caring for your gut won't replace standard kidney care, it may become an important part of supporting your kidney health, overall wellbeing and quality of life.

This article is sponsored by Kibow Biotech, which produces Renadyl®, a dietary supplement containing prebiotic and probiotic ingredients. Sponsorship does not constitute endorsement or recommendation of the product. This product and any statements regarding this product have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. Talk with your healthcare professional before using any dietary supplement.



Resources about eating healthy on dialysis or with a transplant available on Kidney Kitchen

Check out our Kidney Kitchen® resources—available in English and Spanish—on how to maintain a kidney-friendly food and fluid plan when you are on dialysis or living with a kidney transplant. The resources include information on the importance of eating healthily and why certain foods and nutrients need to be limited or prioritized, including protein, sodium (salt), fluids, non-processed foods, potassium and phosphorus.

In addition, there is information on practicing food safety and links to webinars, videos with tips and featured Kidney Kitchen recipes.

For more guidance on kidney-friendly eating while on dialysis, visit [kidneyfund.org/eating-with-esrd](https://www.kidneyfund.org/eating-with-esrd).

For more guidance on eating after a kidney transplant, visit [kidneyfund.org/eating-after-transplant](https://www.kidneyfund.org/eating-after-transplant).

AKF Staff Spotlight



Name: Hannah Rockwood

Hometown: Salt Lake City, Utah

What do you do at AKF?

I am a paralegal. I manage the contract review process, including handling the first-line review of vendor, partner, grant and strategic agreements. I also conduct legal

research on a wide range of topics impacting AKF programs and initiatives, including healthcare regulations, corporate compliance and emerging issues. In addition, I review and assist in the development of policies and procedures that demonstrate AKF's commitment to compliance.

What is your personal connection to kidney disease?

My husband's uncle underwent dialysis, and my cousin's husband received a kidney transplant.

Why are you passionate about fighting kidney disease?

My family carries a gene mutation that significantly increases the carrier's risk of certain cancers. From watching family members undergo extensive testing and cancer treatments, and some unfortunately passing away, I understand how far-reaching and impactful any diagnosis can be and how overwhelming it is to simultaneously navigate medical, financial and emotional needs. AKF helps ease each of these burdens for kidney patients and their families, and that gives me an immense amount of purpose in my work.

What is the best part of your job?

I knew I was interested in a legal career from a young age, but I did not want to work at a law firm. At AKF, I get to do the legal work that I love while also knowing that what I do makes a positive difference in peoples' lives.

What are your favorite hobbies outside of work?

My husband and I welcomed our first child earlier this year, so my main hobby outside work right now is caring for and playing with my son! But besides being a mom (which is my favorite "hobby" by far), I also enjoy hiking with our two border-collie-mix dogs, workout classes, audio books, watching Friends and traveling (to Maine next)!

Kidney Kitchen®

This and other recipes can be found at kitchen.kidneyfund.org.

Fall Pasta Bake

Makes: 6 servings

Serving size: 1/6 recipe



Prep time: 15 min

Cook Time: 75 min

Recipe contributed by FamilyCook Productions.

Nutrition Facts

(1 serving = 1/6 recipe)

Calories = 312

Carbohydrates = 37 g

Sugar = 4 g

Fiber = 3 g

Calcium = 197 mg

Fat = 14 g

Saturated Fat = 4 g

Trans Fat = <1 g

Protein = 12 g

Phosphorus = 213 mg

Cholesterol = 17 mg

Sodium = 293 mg

Potassium = 320 mg

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 medium (100 grams) red onion, finely chopped
- 1 small (74 grams) orange bell pepper, sliced into thin strips
- 1 large bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 1 teaspoon black pepper, ground
- 1/8 teaspoon ground all-spice
- 2 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- 1/2 pound small-shape pasta
- 1/3 cup chopped parsley
- 1/2 medium (249 grams) cauliflower, blanched, cut into florets
- 1 cup mustard greens, torn
- 2 ounces cheddar cheese, grated
- 2 ounces parmesan cheese, grated
- Hot sauce garnish (optional, not included in nutrient analysis)

Special Equipment

- 8" x 12" baking dish



Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Grease the baking dish with cooking spray.
3. Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat.
4. Add chopped onions, pepper strips and bay leaf to the skillet. Cook on medium-low for 15 to 20 minutes. Stir frequently until onions and peppers are softened and browned.
5. Add coriander, cumin and cayenne pepper to the skillet and cook for 1 minute.
6. Transfer half of the cooked onions and peppers to a bowl. Leave the bay leaf in the skillet. Set aside.
7. Add garlic, cumin, black pepper and all-spice to the skillet. Cook for 1 minute, until fragrant.
8. Pour in the vegetable broth and remaining tablespoon of oil to the skillet. Heat over medium heat. Simmer for about 20 minutes, until the sauce thickens. Remove bay leaf.
9. Bring a large pot of water to a boil.
10. Add pasta and cook until 2 minutes shy of al dente. Reserve one cup of pasta water and drain.
11. Add cooked pasta, reserved pasta water and parsley into the skillet with the thickened sauce. Stir well. Turn skillet contents into the prepared baking dish.
12. Top the ingredients in the baking dish with reserved onions and peppers, blanched cauliflower, torn mustard greens and grated cheeses.
13. Bake in the oven for 20 to 25 minutes, until the pasta dish is golden and bubbly.
14. Cool slightly. Serve with hot sauce garnish, if desired.



Cooking Tip

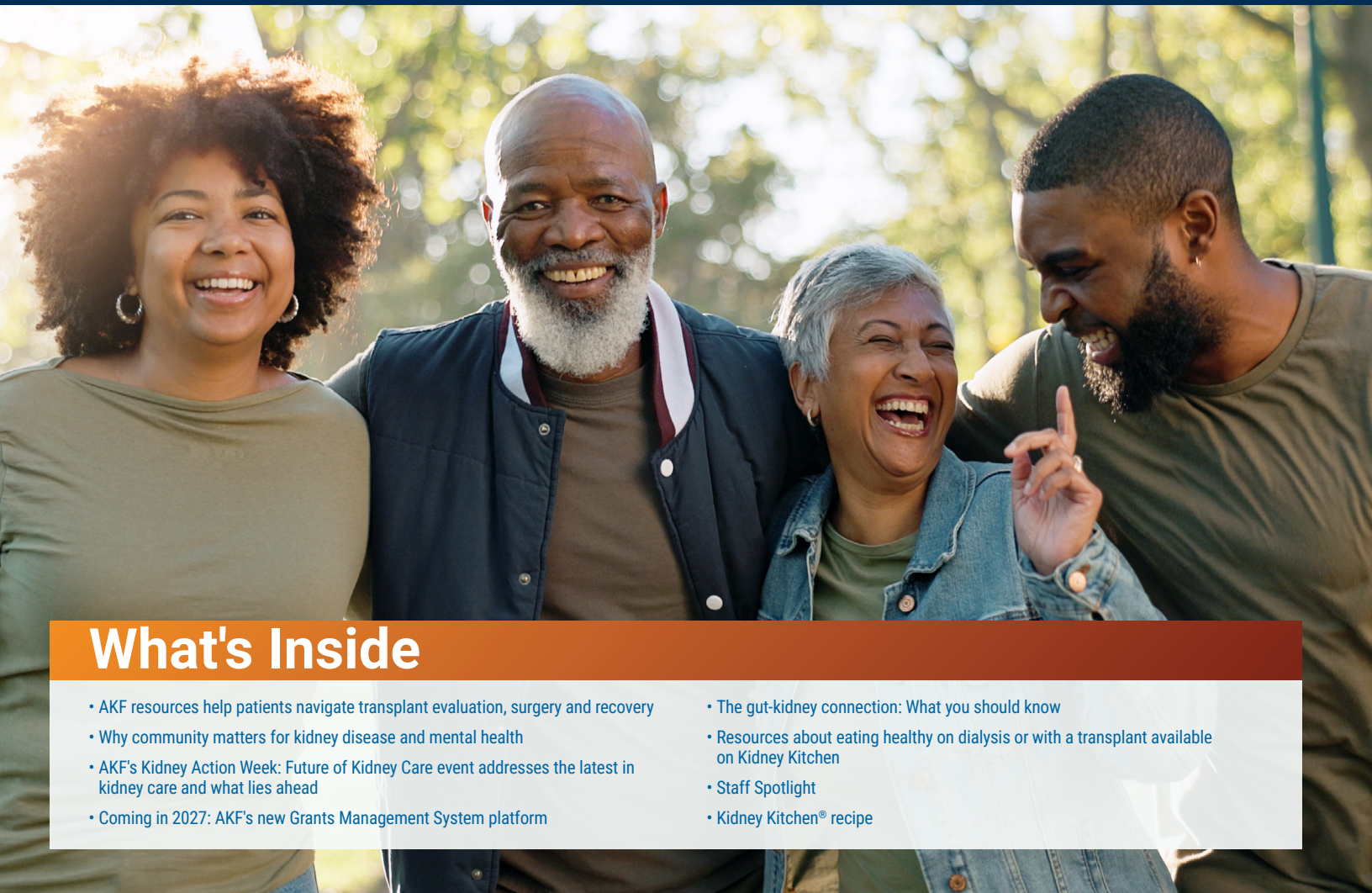
If using whole spices, grind them ahead of time to speed up the recipe.



11921 Rockville Pike
Suite 300
Rockville, MD 20852
(800) 638-8299

[KidneyFund.org](https://www.kidneyfund.org)

AKF is fighting on all fronts as the nation's leading kidney nonprofit.
Sign-up to receive our monthly e-newsletter to get the latest updates at **[KidneyFund.org/sign-up](https://www.kidneyfund.org/sign-up)**.



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How to donate to support the kidney community today

Your donation helps the American Kidney Fund fight kidney disease and support millions of patients in living healthier lives. 96¢ of every dollar donated goes directly to patient support and kidney disease programs.

You can give in any of the following ways:

OPTION 1: Donate by mail

Mail your check or cash gift to:

American Kidney Fund
11921 Rockville Pike, Suite 300
Rockville, MD 20852

OPTION 2: Donate online or over the phone

Visit [KidneyFund.org](https://www.kidneyfund.org) or call us at (800) 638-8299 and press 1 twice.

OPTION 3: Make a legacy gift

Making a gift in your will or living trust, known as a bequest, can guarantee that your legacy endures. Your gift may be a specific dollar amount, a percentage of your estate or the remainder after all other provisions are specified. AKF offers a free online resource to help you write your legal will at no personal cost. Please visit [KidneyFund.org/freewill2026](https://www.kidneyfund.org/freewill2026) to get started.

OPTION 4: KidneyNation

Start your own online fundraiser, community event, corporate fundraiser or charity live stream: [KidneyNation.org](https://www.kidneyfund.org/kidneynation).

✂
CUT HERE

Please return the slip below (along with any checks) to:

American Kidney Fund
11921 Rockville Pike, Suite 300
Rockville, MD 20852

Name: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

☐ Check enclosed (please make payable to American Kidney Fund)

☐ Credit Card

☐ One-time

☐ Monthly

☐ MasterCard

☐ American Express

☐ Visa

☐ Discover

Credit card #: _____

Expiration date: _____

Cardholder's Signature: _____

Cardholder's Name (print): _____

Here are two additional ways to give to AKF:

Partners for Change

Join our Partners for Change community, a group of dedicated American Kidney Fund monthly supporters who are truly partners in every sense of the word. Your regular, monthly gift will support prevention efforts to stop kidney disease before it starts and fund programs that enable people with kidney disease to lead healthier lives.

Monthly giving is the most cost-efficient way to deliver your support to AKF because it allows us to reduce our mailings and other fundraising campaigns. To show our appreciation for your generous, regular commitment to AKF, you'll also receive some special benefits:

- You will receive regular updates about AKF's programs to support kidney patients and those at risk for kidney disease.
- A summary receipt of your donations for the previous year each January
- A personal Partners for Change representative to answer your questions

To sign up, please call (800) 638-8299 (and press 1 twice) or visit us at [kidneyfund.org](https://www.kidneyfund.org).



Vehicle donation program

Has your vehicle seen better days? Give your old ride new life by donating it to help people fight kidney disease and live healthier lives. By donating your used car, truck, boat or RV, you can be assured that your contribution will be used to fund critical services and programs for the individuals we help.

There is no charge to have your vehicle picked up from your home, work or auto shop, and next-day pickup is available. To donate, call our vehicle donation processor, Car Program Inc., at (800) 936-4356.

Even non-working cars can make a difference, so please keep the American Kidney Fund in mind when you are ready to say goodbye to your old vehicle!

