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Combined Federal Campaign #11404

American
Kidney Fund

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giving hope
improving lives

Facts About Kidney Disease



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Facts About Kidney Disease

Millions of Americans are living with kidney disease right now. Because kidney disease often has no symptoms, many of these people don't even know they have it. Kidney disease puts you more at risk for heart attacks, strokes, and early death. Take action today! Learn your risks, check your kidneys and live healthy. This guide can help.

You will learn about:

- Your kidneys and what they do
- Chronic kidney disease
- What puts you at risk for chronic kidney disease
- Tests for chronic kidney disease
- Other common kidney problems
- How to keep your kidneys healthy

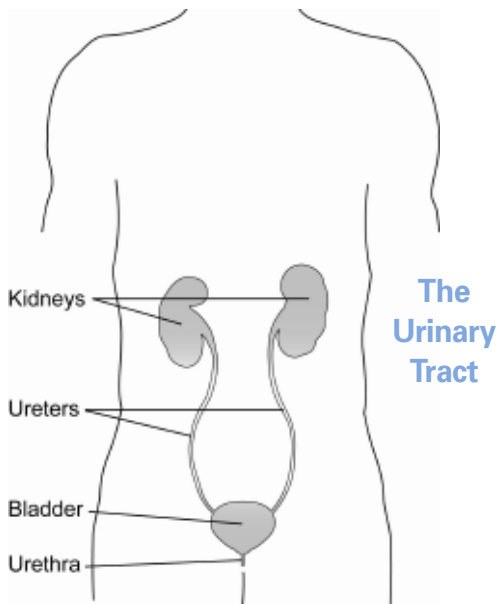


What Your Kidneys Do

Your kidneys clean waste and extra fluid from your blood. This makes up your urine (pee). Your kidneys also do many other jobs that you need in order to live.

Your Kidneys:

- Balance chemicals in your body
- Help control your blood pressure
- Help keep your bones healthy
- Help make red blood cells



The Basics:

- Most people have two kidneys.
- Your kidneys are located on either side of your spine, just below your rib cage.
- Each kidney is about the size of your fist.
- Your kidneys are connected to your bladder by thin tubes called ureters.

Chronic Kidney Disease

The term “chronic kidney disease” (CKD) refers to permanent damage to your kidneys that can get worse over time. If the damage is very bad, your kidneys may stop working. If this happens, you will need dialysis or a transplant in order to live.

CKD can be caused by many different diseases. The most common causes of CKD are diabetes and high blood pressure. Some infections, inherited diseases, and injuries can also cause CKD.

Risks for Chronic Kidney Disease

Anyone can develop CKD, but you are at more risk if you:

- Have diabetes
- Have high blood pressure
- Have cardiovascular (heart) disease
- Are African American, Hispanic, Native American or Asian American
- Are over 60 years old
- Have HIV/AIDS



Symptoms of Kidney Disease

CKD often has no symptoms until it is very far along! The only way to be sure how well your kidneys are working is to get tested.

If you do have symptoms, they might include:

- Feeling sick in your stomach often
- Feeling tired or dizzy often
- Swelling in your feet, hands or face
- Back pain
- Bloody, foamy or dark-colored urine
- High blood pressure
- A change in how often you go to the bathroom (pee more or less often)

Tests for Kidney Disease

Being tested for kidney disease and its risk factors is simple. Ask your doctor about these tests:

eGFR (estimated Glomerular Filtration Rate)

- This test tells your doctor how well your kidneys clean your blood.
- Your doctor tests your blood for a kind of waste called creatinine. Healthy kidneys filter extra creatinine out of your blood. Your doctor will use the result from the test to calculate your eGFR.
- An eGFR of less than 60 for three months or more may be a sign of kidney disease.

Urine Test

- This test tells your doctor if there is blood or protein in your urine.
- Your doctor may test your urine in the office or ask you to collect your urine at home.
- Protein or blood in your urine may be a sign of kidney disease.

Blood Pressure

- This test tells your doctor how hard your heart is working to pump your blood.
- For most people, normal blood pressure is *less than 120/80* (120 over 80). Ask your doctor what your blood pressure should be.
- High blood pressure is the second leading cause of kidney failure, but kidney disease can also cause you to have high blood pressure.

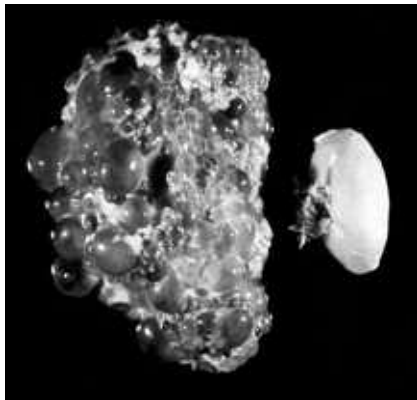
Blood Glucose (Sugar) Test

- This test tells your doctor how much glucose (sugar) is in your blood.
- Your doctor will test your blood, usually after you have fasted (not had anything to eat or drink) for eight hours. For most people, normal fasting blood glucose is less than 100. Ask your doctor what your fasting blood glucose should be.
- Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure, but many people have diabetes and don't know it.

Other Common Kidney Problems

Kidney stones are like small rocks that form in the kidneys. Stones form when certain chemicals in the body clump together. A stone can either stay in the kidney or travel through the urinary tract. Although stones are common, they rarely cause permanent kidney damage.

Polycystic kidney disease (PKD) is a genetic disorder where many cysts grow in the kidneys. PKD cysts can grow out of control and cause the kidneys to fail.



A PKD kidney (left) compared to a normal kidney (right).

Photo courtesy of Polycystic Kidney Disease Foundation

Simple kidney cysts are pouches of fluid in the kidneys. Unless the cysts cause pain, become very large, or become infected, they usually do not need treatment. Simple kidney cysts are common, but your doctor may want to watch some cysts closely.

Kidney infections (called pyelonephritis) are usually caused by germs in the urinary tract. Untreated kidney infections can lead to kidney disease.

Kidney cancer is a disease where one or more tumors form in the kidney.

Nephrotic syndrome is not a disease, but can be the first sign that a disease is damaging the kidneys. Symptoms include:

- Protein in the urine
- Low blood protein
- Swelling

If your doctor thinks you may have one of these kidney problems, he or she may order additional tests, like imaging tests (sonogram, CT scan, MRI, etc.) or a kidney biopsy.

For more information on any of these problems or any other kidney conditions, contact the American Kidney Fund's toll-free HelpLine at 866.300.2900 or helpline@kidneyfund.org.

Remember! If any kidney problem is left untreated, it can lead to kidney disease.

Preventing Kidney Disease

Diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney failure. Live a healthy lifestyle to prevent diabetes and high blood pressure. If you already have diabetes or high blood pressure, control them to prevent chronic kidney disease!

Simple Steps for Living Healthy:

- **See your doctor for regular checkups.**
Ask what you can do to help keep your kidneys healthy.
- **If your doctor prescribes you medicines, take them as directed.**
To work right, many medicines need to be taken even when you feel fine.
- **Exercise regularly.** Try to be active for 30 minutes a day, at least 5 days of the week. Start small and work your way up to this goal.
- **Eat a low-fat and low-salt diet.** A healthy diet can help prevent diabetes, high blood pressure and kidney disease.
- **Avoid tobacco.** Tobacco raises your risk for kidney disease and other health problems.
- **Limit how much alcohol you drink.** Have no more than two drinks per day if you're a man and no more than one drink per day if you're a woman.
- **Get tested.** Kidney disease cannot always be prevented. Get your kidneys tested, and treat kidney disease early if you have it!

Where to Find More Help

To learn more, visit our website at www.kidneyfund.org. If you still have questions, call the American Kidney Fund's toll-free HelpLine at **1.866.300.2900** or e-mail us at helpline@kidneyfund.org.

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