



Reunion
Make **Health** a Family [^]Affair

A guide to discussing the connection between diabetes, high blood pressure, and kidney disease at your family reunion.



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH
AND HUMAN SERVICES



Reunion

Make **Health** a Family **Affair!**

Family reunions are fun and give relatives plenty of time to talk about old times, honor ancestors, sample favorite family recipes, and enjoy being together. And while the family is together, it's also a great time to talk about family health.

This guide will help you talk to your family about kidney disease and its connection to **diabetes** and **high blood pressure**. You may know family members who have diabetes or high blood pressure or both. What you may not know is that these conditions are **the two leading causes of kidney failure**, which affects African Americans more than other groups.

That's why it is important to talk to your family about the risk factors for kidney disease, the need to get tested, and the treatments that are available.

This guide contains the basic information needed to talk to your family about kidney disease and steps they can take to protect their kidneys. You can use the guide yourself or pass it on to the person planning your next family reunion. Either way, you are helping to start (or continue) an important discussion about family health.

The first few pages of the guide have fact sheets about kidney disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure that can be copied and used as handouts. Following the fact sheets, the guide includes three sample approaches for presenting the information:

- Handing out a note to family members
- Talking one-on-one with family members at risk for kidney disease
- Conducting a 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection health discussion

These approaches are only suggestions. Feel free to present the information in a way that's comfortable for you and interesting for your family.

Sharing this information can go a long way toward helping ensure that family members enjoy many more reunions to come. Thank you for helping **Make Health a "Family Reunion" Affair!**

Questions and Answers About the Kidneys and Kidney Disease

Fact Sheet



What to ask your doctor or health care provider:

Based on my
medical and family
history, am I at risk
for kidney disease?

Do my blood
and urine tests
show signs of kidney
disease?

How often should I
be tested?

How can I prevent
or control kidney
disease?

**Bring these questions
and a list of your
medicines with you
when you visit the
doctor.**

What is kidney disease?

Your kidneys (two fist-sized organs located in the lower back) keep you healthy by filtering waste and extra water from your blood, which then leave the body in urine. Kidney disease results from damage, over time, to the tiny structures inside the kidneys that filter the blood. When the kidneys are damaged, they slowly stop doing their job and waste builds up in the blood, harming the body.

If kidney disease is not treated, it can lead to kidney failure. This means the kidneys stop working. **Once the kidneys fail, a person must either begin dialysis or get a kidney transplant.**

Am I at risk for kidney disease?

You are at risk for kidney disease if you have:

- Diabetes OR
- High blood pressure OR
- A family history of kidney disease (your mother, father, sister, or brother had kidney disease or kidney failure).

If you have any of these risk factors, talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting tested.

Diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney failure. Managing these conditions can help reduce the stress on your kidneys. Talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting tested for kidney disease and steps you can take to protect your kidneys.

How do I know if I have kidney disease?

Testing is the only way to know if you have kidney disease. Blood and urine tests can detect kidney damage. **Kidney disease often has no symptoms** until just before the kidneys fail. Don't wait for symptoms to talk to your doctor about getting tested.

What if I have kidney disease?

If tests show you have kidney disease, you can take steps to protect your kidneys from further damage. There are medicines you can take and other things you can do—like controlling your blood sugar and keeping your blood pressure below 130/80—to help delay or prevent kidney failure.

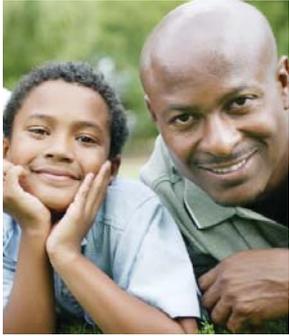
How can I protect my kidneys?

You can protect your kidneys by: 1) taking steps to prevent high blood pressure and diabetes, 2) managing these conditions if you already have them, and 3) getting tested if you are at risk.

For more information, visit www.nkdep.nih.gov or call 1-866-4 KIDNEY (1-866-454-3639).

Questions and Answers About Diabetes

Fact Sheet



Here are some common questions and answers about diabetes that you can share with your family members.

Fact: Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes means that the amount of glucose (sugar) in your blood is too high. That's why people sometimes call diabetes "sugar" or "sweet blood." Your blood always has some glucose in it because your body needs glucose for energy. But too much of it in the blood isn't good for your health.

Diabetes can lead to serious health problems and premature death, but people with diabetes can take steps to control the disease and lower the risk of damaging their kidneys, eyes, nerves, and gums and teeth.

There are two common types of diabetes:

Type 1 diabetes, formerly called juvenile diabetes, is usually first diagnosed in children, teenagers, or young adults. People with type 1 diabetes make no insulin and must take insulin every day. (Insulin helps sugar from food get into your cells.)

Type 2 diabetes, formerly called adult-onset diabetes, is the most common type of diabetes. With type 2 diabetes, the body does not make or use insulin well. People with type 2 diabetes often need to take pills or insulin. Being overweight and inactive increases the chances of developing type 2 diabetes.

Am I at risk for diabetes?

You have a higher chance of getting diabetes if you:

- Are age 45 or older
- Are overweight
- Are African American, Hispanic, Asian American or Pacific Islander, or American Indian
- Have a parent, brother, or sister with diabetes
- Have high blood pressure (above 140/90)
- Have low HDL (good cholesterol) and high levels of blood fats
- Had diabetes when pregnant, or gave birth to a large baby (over 9 pounds)
- Are physically active less than three times a week

Continued on the next page.

Fact Sheet

How do I know if I have diabetes?

You may have one or more of the warning signs below, or you may have no signs at all. Talk to your doctor about getting a blood test to check your glucose levels to know if you have diabetes or pre-diabetes (a condition where blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not high enough for a diagnosis of diabetes).

The signs of diabetes are:

- Being very thirsty
- Urinating often
- Feeling very hungry or tired
- Losing weight without trying
- Having sores that heal slowly
- Having dry, itchy skin
- Losing the feeling in your feet or having tingling in your feet
- Having blurry eyesight

What can I do to control or prevent diabetes?

Managing diabetes requires effort every day to eat healthy foods, be physically active, take diabetes medicine as prescribed, and test blood glucose levels. You can take steps to prevent or slow down other health problems diabetes can cause over the years by keeping your blood glucose, blood pressure, and cholesterol under control. If you have diabetes, work with your health care provider to create a plan for managing your health.

You can do a lot to lower your chances of getting diabetes. Some tips are:

- Be physically active on a regular basis
- Eat less fat and fewer calories
- Lose weight if you need to

Lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels also helps you stay healthy. Talk to your health care provider to make a plan to lessen your risk and improve your health.

For More Information

Contact the National Diabetes Education Program at 1-800-438-5383 or www.ndep.nih.gov.



Questions and Answers About High Blood Pressure

Fact Sheet



Here are some common questions and answers about high blood pressure that you can share with your family members.

Fact: High blood pressure is the second leading cause of kidney failure.

What is high blood pressure?

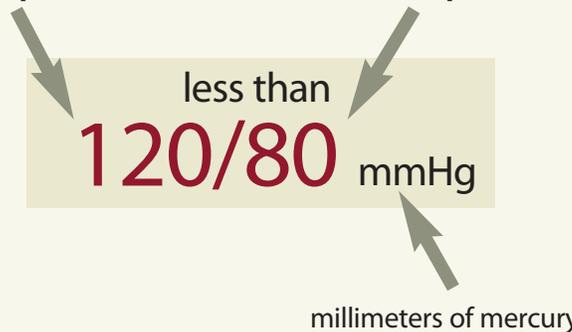
Blood pressure is the force of blood against the walls of your arteries as it is pumped through your body. When this force stays too high, it becomes a life-threatening condition called hypertension, or high blood pressure. It makes the heart work too hard, causing damage to blood vessels, and can lead to serious health problems like heart disease, stroke, and kidney failure.

Normal blood pressure is less than 120/80 mmHg. A blood pressure of 140/90 mmHg or higher is considered high. **If you have diabetes or kidney disease, a blood pressure of 130/80 or higher is considered high.** In general, lower is better. However, very low blood pressure can sometimes be a cause of concern and should be checked out by a doctor.

Normal Blood Pressure

The pressure of blood in the vessels when the heart beats:
systolic pressure

The pressure between beats when the heart relaxes:
diastolic pressure



High blood pressure

140/90 mmHg or higher

Prehypertension

between 120-139 mmHg and/or 80-89 mmHg

Normal blood pressure

less than 120/80 mmHg

Am I at risk for high blood pressure?

Anyone can develop high blood pressure. But there are several factors that increase your risk:

- Being overweight or obese
- Not exercising
- Eating too much salt and sodium
- Not eating enough potassium (found in fruits and vegetables)
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Having diabetes

Continued on the next page.

Questions and Answers About High Blood Pressure (continued)

Fact Sheet



How do I know if I have high blood pressure?

High blood pressure is often called “the silent killer” because it usually has no symptoms.

Some people may not find out they have it until they have complications that affect their heart, brain, or kidneys.

The only way to find out if you have high blood pressure is to have your blood pressure checked regularly by your doctor or health care provider. Most doctors will check your blood pressure several times on different days to get repeated readings before deciding whether you have high blood pressure.

How can I control or prevent high blood pressure?

High blood pressure can be treated and controlled. Many different types of medicines lower blood pressure. Two types—called ACE inhibitors and ARBs—also protect kidney function. Better yet, high blood pressure can be prevented.

Simple and often small lifestyle changes can help control and prevent high blood pressure:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Be physically active
- Follow a healthy eating plan
- Reduce salt and sodium in your diet
- Drink alcohol only in moderation
- Quit smoking
- Control your blood sugar if you have diabetes
- Take prescribed medicine as directed

For More Information

Contact the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) at 1-800-575-WELL (1-800-575-9355) or www.nhlbi.nih.gov/hbp, or visit the International Society on Hypertension in Blacks (ISHIB) website at www.ishib.org.

Approach 1: Note to Family Members



Sign and make copies of this note, and attach it to the *Questions & Answers About the Kidneys and Kidney Disease* fact sheet. You can also use this example as a guide for writing your own personal note.

Tip: You can email the note to family members or distribute it in reunion bags.

You are an important part of our family and I care about your health.

I recently learned that diabetes and high blood pressure are the leading causes of kidney failure, and I wanted to share this information with you.

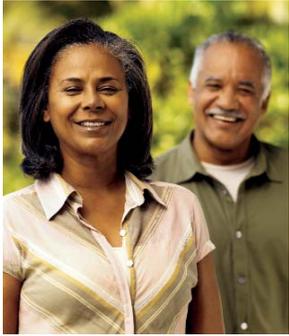
People may know they have diabetes or high blood pressure, but may not know that these conditions put them at risk of developing kidney disease.

Kidney disease is serious—it can cause the kidneys to fail, which means a person must either go on dialysis or get a kidney transplant. But there are things you can do to protect your kidneys.

Please read the attached information. If you are at risk for kidney disease, talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting tested and about other ways to protect your kidneys and stay healthy, so we can all attend many more family reunions.

For more information about kidney disease, call 1-866-4 KIDNEY (1-866-454-3639) or visit www.nkdep.nih.gov.

Approach 2: Talking One-on-One



You can include health information at your reunion by talking one-on-one with family members at risk for kidney disease. You may already know which family members have diabetes or high blood pressure, or you may need to ask others in your family to help you identify them. Start a conversation with these family members, and help them make the connection between their diabetes or high blood pressure and their kidney function.

Below are some talking points to help you begin the conversation:

- I know that you have [diabetes and/or high blood pressure]. I recently learned that diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney failure. Do you know if you've been tested for kidney disease?
- Don't wait for symptoms. Early kidney disease has no symptoms. Many people don't know they have it until just before the kidneys fail. If your kidneys fail, you'll have to either go on dialysis or get a kidney transplant.
- Blood and urine tests can detect kidney damage. Testing is the only way to know if you have kidney disease. So please talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting tested.
- If you have kidney disease, there are medicines called ACE inhibitors and ARBs you can take and other things you can do to help delay or prevent kidney failure. This is why testing is so important.

Tip: Copy the fact sheets in this guide for your family members. Encourage them to take the information to their doctor.

Tips for approaching family members

Sometimes it can be awkward talking to family members one-on-one about personal health issues. Keep these tips in mind when approaching family members at risk:

- Familiarize yourself with the fact sheets in this guide. Offer to help family members find more information. Start with the toll-free numbers and websites listed in the guide.
- Ask permission to have the conversation, and choose the right time and environment. A quiet, private place that is free from distractions is best.
- If a family member is not comfortable talking about their health, don't force a discussion. Express your feelings of concern. Let them know that you'll be ready to talk whenever they are.
- Acknowledge that it's not always easy to face our personal health problems. Be supportive and listen. Emphasize that the final decision to talk to the doctor is theirs.
- Offer to go with them to the doctor.

Approach 3: The 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection Health Discussion



If you're able to get time on the family reunion agenda—and think that your family members would be open to a short talk—consider conducting this 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection health discussion. It presents a quick overview of the most important information your family members should know about kidney disease: how to know if they are at risk, how to get tested, and what can be done if they have kidney disease.

Here's how it works. Talking points are **boxed** below. Feel free to put the information into your own words and be creative to make it work for your family.

The steps:

1. Introduce the session
2. Talk about kidney disease risk factors
3. Talk about testing and treatment
4. Talk about other steps to take to protect the kidneys
5. Encourage family members to look out for one another
6. End the session

1. Introduce the session

Thank you for giving me some time today to talk about an important health issue—kidney disease. I recently learned that more and more people, especially African Americans, are being diagnosed with kidney disease and experiencing kidney failure, which means they have to go on dialysis or get a kidney transplant. Many people who have a greater chance of getting kidney disease don't know that they are at risk. I want us all to have many more reunions together, so I want to share this information with you.

Why should we know about kidney disease?

- Because the number of people with kidney disease is increasing rapidly. About 20 million Americans already have it.
- Because kidney disease strikes African Americans more than other groups.
- Because it is very likely that some of us are at risk. Some of us may know it, and others may not.
- And, finally, because there's good news: kidney disease can be treated and kidney failure can be prevented! I want to make sure we all know what we can do to protect our kidneys.

Continued on the next page.

Approach 3: The 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection Health Discussion (continued)



Fact: Diabetes and high blood pressure cause about 70% of kidney failure cases.

2. Talk about kidney disease risk factors

Diabetes, high blood pressure, and a family history of kidney disease are the three main risk factors for kidney disease.

Keep in mind that your family members may know that they or other members of the family have diabetes or high blood pressure, or that a close family member (mother, father, sister, or brother) has kidney disease or kidney failure. But they may not know that having any one of these conditions or “risk factors” means they are more likely than other people to develop kidney disease. Find out what your family members know about kidney disease risk factors.

OK, who can name one of the three leading causes of kidney disease?

Give family members a chance to offer some possible causes. You’re likely to get a variety of responses. But the leading causes of kidney disease are: diabetes, high blood pressure, and a family history of kidney disease. Remember, having just one of these risk factors increases the risk of developing kidney disease.

Diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney failure. They cause about 70 percent of kidney failure cases. A family history of kidney disease—a mother, father, sister, or brother had kidney disease or kidney failure—also increases a person’s chance of getting kidney disease.

So, if you have diabetes OR high blood pressure OR a family history of kidney disease, you are at high risk of developing kidney disease.

You don’t have to raise your hand, but think about it. How many of you are at risk for kidney disease or know a family member who is at risk?

Continued on the next page.

Approach 3: The 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection Health Discussion (continued)



Tests for kidney disease

Blood test:

Used to calculate a patient's GFR (glomerular filtration rate), which tells how well the kidneys are working.

Urine test:

Used to measure protein in the urine. Protein can leak into the urine when the kidneys are not working well.

Treatment for kidney disease

ACE inhibitors and ARBs are medicines that are used to protect kidney function.

3. Talk about testing and treatment

So, what do you do if you are at risk? Talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting tested. Testing is the only way to know if you have kidney disease. Many people don't know they have kidney disease until their kidneys are just about ready to fail. By then, it is too late to do anything other than begin dialysis or have a kidney transplant.

That's why testing is so important. The doctor or health care provider tests your blood and urine for signs of kidney damage.

The good news is that if kidney disease is found, there are medicines called ACE inhibitors and ARBs you can take and there are other things you can do to slow down the damage to your kidneys. For some people, the medication can keep the kidneys from failing.

So, if you have even ONE of the risk factors we've been talking about—diabetes or high blood pressure or a family history of kidney disease—ask your doctor or health care provider to test your kidneys.

4. Talk about other steps to take to protect the kidneys

It's also important to control your diabetes and high blood pressure. By following your doctor's advice—whether that means taking medication, following a special diet, or exercising—you help reduce the stress on your heart and blood vessels, which can lead to kidney disease. But even if you have your diabetes and high blood pressure under control, it is important to have your kidneys tested.

Continued on the next page.

Approach 3: The 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection Health Discussion (continued)



Other tips:

1. Create a family health chart. A web-based tool for making a family health portrait can be found at familyhistory.hhs.gov.
2. Are there certain members of the family that family members listen to? If so, ask for their help.
3. Assemble a family directory to encourage family members to keep in touch throughout the year.

5. Encourage family members to look out for one another

Here are two suggestions for following up with family members who may be at risk for kidney disease.

Designate family health buddies

Designate a “family health buddy” for each family member. Ask family members to pair up and exchange contact information. Then, ask everyone to commit to follow up with their family health buddy at some point over the next three months to check on his or her health.

Encourage family members to continue to follow up with each other, especially those who have kidney disease risk factors or other illnesses.

Create a follow up list of family members at risk

If your family is one that talks openly about their personal health conditions, you may already know which members of your family have one or more kidney disease risk factors. Make a list of these family members, and ask others to let you know—either during the session or afterward—if they have diabetes or high blood pressure or a mother, father, sister, or brother who had kidney disease or kidney failure.

Collect their contact information and follow up with a call, email, letter, or visit some time over the next three months to again encourage them to talk to their doctor or health care provider about getting tested for kidney disease.

A friendly reminder gives you and other family members a chance to express your concern, and may be just what the family member at risk needs to take the next step.

Continued on the next page.

Approach 3: The 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection Health Discussion (continued)



Fun tip:

Buy or collect small gifts and award them to the family member who can:

- Name the leading causes of kidney failure.
- Identify the only way to tell if a person has kidney disease.
- Name the two options for people whose kidneys stop working.
- Name two ways to protect kidney function.

Possible prizes:

Picture frame

Movie tickets

Old-school CD

A T-shirt or hat from the reunion city

6. End the session

Thank everyone for their attention and for agreeing to look out for each other.

If you'd like to distribute NKDEP materials to your family members, visit www.nkdep.nih.gov/familyreunion for kidney disease resources. You can download information from the website and copy it, or you can order hard copies of materials.

If family members have questions or want more information, direct them to the website or ask them to call 1-866-4 KIDNEY (1-866-454-3639).

If family members would like more information about diabetes, direct them to the National Diabetes Education Program website (www.ndep.nih.gov) or ask them to call 1-800-438-5383.

If family members would like more information about high blood pressure, direct them to the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) website (www.nhlbi.nih.gov), or the International Society on Hypertension in Blacks (ISHIB) website (www.ishib.org). They can also call 1-800-575-WELL (1-800-575-9355) for more information.



Let us know how it went!

Mail in this form and we'll send you a free photo album.

Reply and receive a free photo album for your favorite reunion photos

(Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery)

Send your completed form to:

NIDDK NIH, National Kidney Disease Education Program, 31 Center Dr., RM 9A06 MSC 2560, Bethesda, MD 20814-9692

Be part of our online family photo album.

Send in a family photo (make sure it's OK with your family members in the picture), and we'll add it to our online family photo gallery. Send the photo with this form, or use the link on the website to email your photo at www.nkdep.nih.gov/familyreunion.

Please note that your photo will not be returned.

We would love to hear what you and your family think about the Kidney Connection Guide. We want to make this guide easy and valuable for African-American families, so your comments — positive and negative — will be greatly appreciated. Please answer the following questions.

I used the Kidney Connection Guide at my reunion or family gathering on

_____ in _____
(date) (city)

I shared the information with about _____ people.

I used the following approach(es) (check all that apply):

- One-on-one talk Note to family members
 15-minute discussion I created my own approach

I found the guide:

- Easy to use Somewhat easy to use Difficult to use

How would you change the guide? (check all that apply):

- Provide more information Provide less information
 Make it easier to understand Provide more sample approaches
 I wouldn't change it

How interested was your family in the information you provided? (check all that apply):

- Very interested Somewhat interested Not at all interested

Did your family think the information was appropriate for the family reunion?

- Yes No Not sure

Any other comments? _____

Let us know where to send your free photo album. Please print clearly.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Thank you for your feedback and for taking a great step toward improving your family's health!

NKDEP Family Reunion partners:



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