



What to ask your doctor or health care provider:

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

Would lowering my blood pressure help reduce my risk of developing kidney disease?

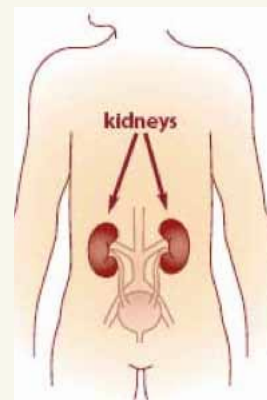
Do my blood and urine tests show signs of kidney disease?

What can I do to keep my kidneys healthy?

Take these questions and a list of your current medicines with you when you visit the doctor.

What is Kidney Disease?

You have two kidneys. They are bean-shaped, and about the size of a fist. They are located in the middle of your back, on the left and right sides of your spine, just below your rib cage. Their main job is to filter extra water and wastes out of your blood and make urine. They also help control blood pressure and make hormones that your body needs to stay healthy. Kidney disease means that the kidneys are damaged and can't filter blood like they should. This damage can cause wastes to build up in the body. It also can cause other problems that can harm your health.



If kidney disease is not treated, it can lead to kidney failure. This means the kidneys stop working. Once the kidneys fail, you will need dialysis or a kidney transplant to maintain health.

Are You at Risk for Kidney Disease?

Kidney disease is a growing problem. More than 20 million Americans may have kidney disease and many more are at risk. Anyone can develop kidney disease, regardless of age or race. You are at risk for kidney disease if you have:

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

Kidney disease is most often caused by diabetes or high blood pressure.

Diabetes and high blood pressure damage the blood vessels in the kidneys, so the kidneys are not able to filter the blood as well as they used to. Usually this damage happens slowly, over many years. As more and more blood vessels are damaged, the kidneys eventually stop working. More and more people are developing kidney disease as the number of people with diabetes grows.

African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians are at high risk for developing kidney failure. This risk is due in part to high rates of diabetes and high blood pressure in these communities. African Americans are almost four times as likely as Caucasians to develop kidney failure. And, while African Americans make up only about 13 percent of the population, they account for 32 percent of the people with kidney failure in the United States.

If you have any of the risk factors, ask your doctor or health care provider about getting tested. It is important to learn about the basics of kidney disease and how to keep the kidneys healthier longer.

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What you should know about kidney disease:

- Early kidney disease has no signs or symptoms.
- Kidney disease usually does not go away.
- Kidney disease can be treated. The earlier you know you have it, the better.
- Blood and urine tests are used to check for kidney disease.
- Kidney disease can progress to kidney failure.

Early kidney disease has no symptoms.

Testing is the **only** way to know if you have kidney disease. That means you can't feel that you have it. In fact, you might feel just fine until your kidneys have almost stopped working. Don't wait for symptoms. Blood and urine tests are the only way to know if you have kidney disease. A blood test measures your GFR, determining how well your kidneys are filtering, and a urine test checks for protein.

Kidney disease can be treated if detected early.

The sooner you know you have kidney disease, the sooner you can get treatment to help delay or prevent kidney failure. Treatment may include taking medicines called ACE inhibitors or ARBs to manage high blood pressure and keep your kidneys healthier longer. Treating kidney disease may also help prevent heart disease.

Kidney disease is progressive.

Kidney disease usually does not go away. It may get worse over time and can lead to kidney failure. If the kidneys fail, treatment with dialysis or a kidney transplant is necessary to maintain health. Kidney disease also can lead to other health conditions including heart disease. In fact, people with kidney disease are more likely to have a stroke or heart attack.

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—such as controlling your blood sugar and keeping your blood pressure below the target set by your health care provider—to help delay or prevent kidney failure.

How can I protect my kidneys?

You can protect your kidneys by:

- Taking steps to prevent high blood pressure and diabetes,
- Managing these conditions if you already have them, and
- 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).

Take the first step

If you are at risk, get your blood and urine checked for kidney disease.