



Chronic Kidney Disease – Information For Patients

What do your kidneys do?

Your kidneys are as important to your health as your heart or your lungs. Their main job is to remove waste from the blood and return cleaned blood back into the body. Your kidneys also produce important hormones that regulate some of your body's functions and help balance water and minerals in your body.

What is chronic kidney disease?

Kidney disease describes a variety of medical conditions that affect the kidneys and impact the kidney's ability to filter wastes. Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is defined as the presence of kidney damage, or decreased level of kidney function, for a period of three months or more. CKD usually starts slowly and progresses over a number of years. If diagnosed and treated early, CKD may be slowed down or stopped. However, if it keeps getting worse, CKD may lead to kidney failure, also called End-Stage Renal Disease (ESRD). If you have ESRD, care options include dialysis or a kidney transplant, which can help you continue your daily activities.

Who is at risk of developing CKD?

The two most common causes of kidney disease are diabetes and hypertension, or high blood pressure. These conditions interfere with the kidneys' ability to filter waste and can lead to kidney failure. Early diagnosis and careful management of these conditions can delay and even prevent the onset of kidney failure. Talk to your health care practitioner if you have diabetes or hypertension.

Other factors that increase a person's risk of developing CKD include:

- Family history of kidney disease (e.g., polycystic kidney disease)
- Certain ethnic groups (people of Aboriginal and First Nations, African, Pacific Island, and Asian heritage)
- Overuse of anti-inflammatory drugs and pain-killers
- Infection or injury to the kidneys (e.g., glomerulonephritis)

The Kidney Foundation of Canada offers an online quiz to help you know if you should talk to your health care practitioner about having your kidney function checked. See www.kidney.ca/RiskAssessment to take the quiz.

What are the symptoms of kidney disease?

Most people do not have any symptoms in the early stages of CKD. This is why a laboratory test is usually needed to check kidney function. People with kidney disease may experience nonspecific symptoms. However, symptoms more suggestive of kidney impairment should be discussed with a physician, and include: persistent puffiness of the eyes, hands or feet; or changes in urination (passing less urine, difficulty passing urine, bloody or tea-coloured urine, or excessive foaming of the urine). Note that pain is not a usual symptom of CKD. CKD is often silent.

How can I prevent or control CKD?

There is no cure for CKD, but by learning more about your illness and taking an active part in managing your health you may be able to keep your kidneys functioning longer. Learn as much as you can about your kidney disease and carefully follow instructions from your members of your healthcare team. Consider using the BCGuidelines.ca *Chronic Kidney Disease Flow Sheet* to monitor your progress and discuss it with your health care practitioner.

Other important things you can do to stay well and maintain a good quality of life include:

- A well-balanced diet
 - Certain foods can decrease kidney function more quickly. Talk to a dietician or nutritionist to develop a daily eating plan that will meet your nutritional needs and limit kidney damage. Dietary information is available through HealthLink BC (www.healthlinkbc.ca).
- Regular physical activity and weight control
 - Exercise helps you to lower your blood sugar and blood pressure, achieve a healthy weight, improve your heart and lung health, and improve your physical, mental and emotional well-being.

- Good blood pressure control
 - Uncontrolled hypertension causes kidney damage and will also cause kidney function to deteriorate more quickly. Changes to lifestyle can help you manage your high blood pressure, including eating well, quitting smoking, keeping a healthy body weight, getting regular exercise, and cutting down on alcohol. You may also need to take medications to control your high blood pressure. Talk to your health care practitioner about which treatment is right for you.
- Diabetes control
 - Talk to your health care practitioner about what you can do to manage your diabetes and limit kidney damage from uncontrolled diabetes. For more information, see the Canadian Diabetes Association's patient resources at guidelines.diabetes.ca/PatientResources or contact a local branch in your area.
- Quitting smoking
 - Quitting smoking is important to help prevent kidney disease. For information and support to help you with quitting smoking, visit QuitNow services online at www.quitnow.ca, or by phone toll-free to 1-877-455-2233. You can also talk to your health care practitioner about access to prescription drugs and nicotine replacement therapies through the BC Smoking Cessation Program (see www.health.gov.bc.ca/pharmacare/stop-smoking/).
- Reduce stress
 - Recognize that it may take time to adjust to CKD – so be patient and set realistic goals. Keep involved in the pleasures, activities and responsibilities of daily life. Share your feelings with family and close friends or consider joining a support group.
- Taking medications as prescribed
 - Take your medications as prescribed by your health care practitioner. Frequent use of over-the-counter anti-inflammatory medications can damage your kidneys (e.g. ibuprofen [Advil, Motrin] and, naproxen [Anaprox]). Talk to your care provider or pharmacist to find out how to use non-prescription medication that won't damage your kidneys.

Resources for People with Chronic Kidney Disease

Kidney Foundation of Canada (BC Branch)
 Tel: 604-736-9775(Vancouver area)
 1-800-567-8112(elsewhere in BC)
 Fax:604-736-9703
 Email:info@kidney.bc.ca

The Kidney Foundation has patient support groups in many areas of BC as well as educational material and offers short term financial assistance for those in need.

BC Provincial Renal Agency (BCPRA)

Tel: 604 875-7340
 Email:bcpra@bcpra.ubc.ca

The BC Provincial Renal Agency plans and coordinates the care of patients with kidney disease in BC. They offer information and resources for patients and their families at www.bcrenalagency.ca/patients.

HealthLink BC

Information on kidney disease is available through HealthLink BC online (www.healthlinkbc.ca) and by phone. By calling 8-1-1 (or 7-1-1 for TTY) you can connect directly with a registered nurse, registered dietician, or a pharmacist.

The living with Kidney Disease patient manual produced by The Kidney Foundation of Canada is an important educational reference for people living with kidney disease. The manual is available in English, French, Chinese, Punjabi and Italian on the Kidney Foundation website: www.kidney.ca/page.aspx?pid=394. Print copies are available through your local renal program or Kidney Foundation branch.