

Chronic Kidney Disease

Patient Education Handout

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) means your kidneys are damaged and can't filter blood the way they should. The disease is called "chronic" because the damage to your kidneys happens slowly over a long period of time. This damage can cause wastes to build up in your body. CKD can also cause other health problems.

The kidneys' main job is to filter extra water and wastes out of your blood to make urine. To keep your body working properly, the kidneys balance the salts and minerals—such as calcium, phosphorus, sodium, and potassium—that circulate in the blood. Your kidneys also make hormones that help control blood pressure, make red blood cells, and keep your bones strong.

Kidney disease often can get worse over time and may lead to kidney failure. If your kidneys fail, you will need dialysis or a kidney transplant to maintain your health.

The sooner you know you have kidney disease, the sooner you can make changes to protect your kidneys.

How common is CKD?

CKD is common among adults in the United States. More than 30 million people, or 15% of US adults, may have CKD.

Who is more likely to develop CKD?

You are at high risk for kidney disease if you have:

- Diabetes
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Family history of kidney failure

What are the symptoms of CKD?

Early CKD may not have any symptoms. As kidney disease gets worse, a person may have swelling, called edema. Edema happens when the kidneys can't get rid of extra fluid and salt. Edema can occur in the legs, feet, or ankles, and less often in the hands or face.

Symptoms of advanced CKD include:

- Chest pain
- Itching or numbness
- Headaches
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Dry skin
- Feeling tired
- Increased or decreased urination
- Muscle cramps
- Shortness of breath

- Sleep problems
- Vomiting
- Trouble concentrating
- Weight loss

Does CKD cause other health problems?

Kidney disease can lead to other health problems, such as heart disease. If you have kidney disease, it increases your chances of having a stroke or heart attack.

High blood pressure can be both a cause and a result of kidney disease. High blood pressure damages your kidneys, and damaged kidneys don't work as well to help control your blood pressure.

If you have CKD, you also have a higher chance of having a sudden change in kidney function caused by illness, injury, or certain medicines. This is called acute kidney injury (AKI).

How can CKD affect my day-to-day life?

Many people are afraid to learn that they have kidney disease because they think that all kidney disease leads to dialysis. However, most people with kidney disease will not need dialysis. If you have kidney disease, you can continue to live a productive life, work, spend time with friends and family, stay physically active, and do other things you enjoy. You may need to change what you eat and add healthy habits to your daily routine to help you protect your kidneys.

More Resources

[Kidney Disease Fact Sheet](#)

[Blood Pressure and Kidney Disease](#)

[Diabetes and Kidney Disease](#)

[Tests for Kidney Health](#)

Sources

[National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases](#)

[American Kidney Fund](#)

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