



Strong Kidneys

Protect your kidneys, protect your future

Let's Talk Kidney Health

Introduction

Your kidneys play a big role in keeping you healthy. Taking care of them now can help prevent serious problems later on. This guide will help you better understand your kidneys and give you the confidence to talk to your doctor about your kidney health. By learning more about how your kidneys work, understanding the risks, and knowing what questions to ask, you can take action to keep your kidneys healthy for years to come.

Understanding your Kidneys

Your kidneys are essential organs that each contain up to one million tiny filters. These filters clean your blood by removing waste and extra fluid. Once your blood is cleaned, it is returned to circulation, while the waste and extra fluid leave your body when you urinate.¹

Your kidneys also:²



Help keep your
blood pressure
steady



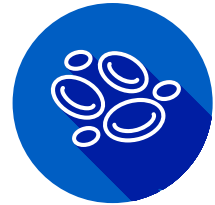
Help make healthy
red blood cells
that carry oxygen
around your body



Keep your body
hydrated



Support strong
bones



Help create
important
hormones

Questions you can ask to get to know your kidneys

Talking to your doctor about how your kidneys are working is a great first step in taking care of them. You can start by asking questions, such as:

Can you explain
how my kidneys
work?

How can
I know if my
kidneys are
healthy?

What do
my kidneys do
for my overall
health?

What are
some common
problems that
affect the
kidneys?

What is Chronic Kidney Disease?

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) is a long-term condition that happens when your kidneys are damaged and do not work properly for at least three months.³ The condition develops slowly and progresses in five stages:³

Early stages (Stages 1-3)

Mild to moderate damage, but your kidneys are still working

Later stages (Stages 4-5)

Severe damage, and your kidneys may stop working

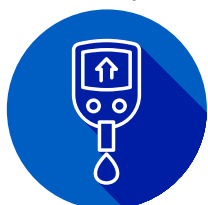
Advanced CKD is a serious condition that can lead to the build-up of dangerous amounts of fluid, salt and potassium, and toxic waste in your body.³ That's why it's important to talk to your doctor right away if you notice any problems. Catching CKD early can help you get the right treatment sooner.

Around 13% of people worldwide have CKD, and the risk is higher for those with conditions like high blood pressure or diabetes.⁴

Am I at risk of CKD?

The main factors that increase your risk of developing CKD are:^{3,5}

If you have any of these risk factors, it is important to talk to your doctor about



Diabetes



Obesity



Smoking



Heart disease



High blood pressure
(hypertension)



Family history of CKD



Age (the risk of CKD
increases with age)



Some medications that
are toxic to the kidneys

your kidney health. But even if you don't have these risk factors, it's still a good idea to check in with your doctor regularly to keep your kidneys healthy in the long run.

To learn more, ask your doctor:

What are the main risk factors for CKD, and do I have any of them?



How to keep your kidneys healthy

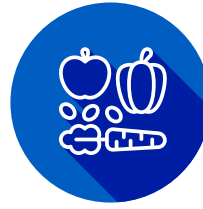
There are many lifestyle choices you can make to help keep your kidneys healthy.^{6, 7, 8}



Keep a healthy weight



Reduce alcohol intake



Eat more fruits and vegetables



Quit smoking



Reduce salt intake



Get enough sleep



Watch your blood sugar



Exercise regularly



Take medications as prescribed



Watch your blood pressure



Stay well hydrated



Manage stress

You might also want to ask your doctor:

Do any of the medications I'm taking raise my risk of CKD?

What changes can I make to my daily habits to prevent CKD?

How can I lower my risk of getting CKD?



How is CKD diagnosed?

Your doctor can check for CKD with a few simple tests:⁹

- **Blood tests** to see if your kidneys are working properly
- **Urine tests** to look for the presence of protein, which can be a sign of kidney damage

To better understand how your kidneys are doing, you can use the “ABCDE” approach when talking to your doctor. These five questions can help you learn more about your risk for kidney disease:¹⁰



Do I have protein (Albumin) in my urine?

Why ask?

Albumin is the most common protein in your blood. Healthy kidneys typically do not let albumin pass into your urine. If albumin is in your urine, it may be a sign your kidneys are damaged.



What is my Blood pressure?

Why ask?

Blood pressure measures how hard your blood pushes against the walls of your arteries. High blood pressure can damage your kidneys over time, so it's important to keep it in a healthy range.



What is my Cholesterol?

Why ask?

Cholesterol is a fatty substance that circulates in your blood. High cholesterol can lead to damage in the vessels and reduce blood flow to your kidneys, increasing your risk for CKD.



Do I have Diabetes?

Why ask?

Diabetes is when your blood sugar is too high. Over time, high blood sugar can damage the small blood vessels in your kidneys, making it harder for them to filter your blood.



How well are my kidneys working (Estimated GFR)?

Why ask?

GFR (Glomerular Filtration Rate) is a test that shows how well your kidneys are filtering your blood. A lower GFR can mean your kidneys are not working as well as they should.

How is CKD treated?

Although there is no cure for CKD, there are ways to manage it and slow it down:

- Control your blood sugar if you have diabetes
- Control your blood pressure
- Take medications as prescribed
- Eat a kidney-friendly diet
- Have regular check-ups with your doctor

By working closely with your doctor, you can create a treatment plan that works for you. Your doctor will also check your kidney health regularly to help keep things on track.

How can I learn more?

This guide gives you some helpful information about kidney health, but if you want to learn more, here are some additional questions to ask your doctor:

Are my kidneys working well?

Do I have any risk factors that could harm my kidneys?

What lifestyle changes can help protect my kidneys?

How often should I get my kidneys checked?

Are there support groups or resources that can help me manage my kidney health?



This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary school handwriting practice paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

For more information, please visit:
www.era-online.org/strong-kidneys



1. National Kidney Foundation (2024). Kidney function. Available at: [https://www.kidney.org/kidney-topics/kidney-function#:~:text=to%20the%20bathroom,-,Kidney%20function%20testing,%2Dcreatinine%20ratio%20\(uACR\)](https://www.kidney.org/kidney-topics/kidney-function#:~:text=to%20the%20bathroom,-,Kidney%20function%20testing,%2Dcreatinine%20ratio%20(uACR))
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3. Kidney Disease: Improving Global Outcomes (KDIGO) (2024). KDIGO 2024 Clinical Practice Guideline for the Evaluation and Management of Chronic Kidney Disease. Kidney Int. 105:S117-S314. Available from: <https://kdigo.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/KDIGO-2024-CKD-Guideline.pdf>.
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5. Kazancioğlu, R. (2011). Risk factors for chronic kidney disease: an update. Available from: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC4089662/#:~:text=For%20instance%2C%20being%20of%20African,also%20lead%20to%20kidney%20disease>
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7. Kidney Care UK (2024). Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD). Available from: <https://kidneycareuk.org/kidney-disease-information/kidney-conditions/patient-info-ckd-chronic-kidney-disease>
8. European Renal Association. ERA Strong Kidneys Leaflet. p2, under “Care for Your Kidneys”. Available at: https://www.era-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/ERA-Strong-Kidneys-Leaflet_ENG.pdf
9. European Renal Association. ERA Strong Kidneys Leaflet. p2, under “How Do I Recognise CKD?”. Available at: https://www.era-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/ERA-Strong-Kidneys-Leaflet_ENG.pdf
10. ERA Renal Association. Publications. News. Do you know your ABCDE profile? Available from: <https://www.era-online.org/publications/do-you-know-your-abcde-profile/>