

Living with chronic kidney disease

This leaflet is for people who have been diagnosed with chronic kidney disease (CKD). It explains what the condition is, how it is managed, and what to expect.

What do the kidneys do?

The kidneys are two bean-shaped organs, each about the size of a clenched fist, that sit in your lower back just under the rib cage.

They have many important roles, one of which is filtering out waste products from your blood and turning them into urine.



What is chronic kidney disease (CKD)?

Chronic kidney disease, or CKD, is a long-term condition where your kidneys don't work as well as they should. It means that your kidneys cannot remove waste products from your blood very well, and it can allow blood or protein to leak into your urine.

It's a common condition, affecting about 1 in 10 people in the UK. It can affect children or adults of any age, though the older you are, the more likely you are to have some degree of CKD.

A diagnosis of CKD can be concerning, but there is a lot of advice and support available for you and your family, and there's a lot you can do to make sure your condition does not get worse – you can even stop its progression. With good care, many people with CKD live long and active lives.

What are the symptoms of CKD?

Most people with CKD do not have noticeable symptoms, because their kidneys can still function even if they're damaged. This is why it's important for your doctor to do blood and urine tests to see how you're doing.

People with advanced CKD may experience symptoms such as tiredness, an increased need to pee, swollen ankles or legs, or shortness of breath.

Will I need to have regular tests, even if I have no symptoms?

Yes – whether you have symptoms or not. Most people with CKD have a check-up every 6 to 12 months, though this may be more often for those with advanced CKD.

These check-ups may be done at your GP surgery, at a hospital outpatient appointment, or via remote monitoring services.

Your check-up may include:

- a **blood test** – this measures the levels of a waste product called ‘creatinine’ in your blood
- a **urine test** – to check for blood or protein in your urine
- **blood pressure** and **weight** checks

You may also be asked to go to hospital for some further tests, such as an ultrasound, CT scan or seeing a specialist kidney doctor.

What does my ‘eGFR’ mean?

Your doctor will look at your blood test results, as well as your age, size, height and weight to figure out how much waste your kidneys can filter from your blood in a minute. This is known as your eGFR (estimated glomerular filtration rate).

Your healthcare team will likely talk to you about your eGFR when discussing your CKD as it shows how well your kidneys are functioning.

eGFR*	What does this mean?	How often do I need a check-up?
90 or above	Stage 1: normal kidney function but other tests have shown signs of kidney damage	✓ No need for check-ups unless your healthcare provider advises otherwise
60 – 89	Stage 2: mild CKD	
45 – 59	Stage 3a: mild/moderate CKD	✓ Approximately every 6 months
30 – 44	Stage 3b: moderate/severe CKD	
15 – 29	Stage 4: severe CKD	✓ Approximately every 4 months
<15	Stage 5: kidney failure	✓ Close monitoring required

*eGFR is measured in ml/min/1.73 m².

If you’re not sure how often you need to have a check-up, make sure you ask your GP or hospital specialist. It may be worth setting a diary reminder for your next follow-up in your calendar. Check-ups are a good opportunity to talk about any symptoms you have, or should look out for, and whether you have experienced any side effects from medicines.

How may CKD affect my health?

When your kidneys aren’t working as well as they should, other parts of your body may be affected. CKD can increase your risk of having a stroke, high blood pressure, or acute kidney injury, which is when your kidney function worsens in a short time frame. You can talk to your doctor if you are worried about any of these conditions.

CKD is also linked with heart disease, as your kidneys and heart work closely together. Problems with the heart and high blood pressure can lead to ‘heart failure’, which is a serious condition where your heart becomes less effective at pumping blood around the body.

Looking after your kidney health will help reduce your chances of developing heart conditions and other issues. This can be done through positive lifestyle changes, taking medicines as instructed (if you have been prescribed any), and keeping an eye on your overall health.

What treatments are there?

There is no cure for CKD, but treatment can slow its progression. It can also prevent other serious conditions from developing and it can help keep your blood pressure at a healthy level.

Treatments include:

- **lifestyle changes** to keep you healthy
- **medicines** if you have problems associated with kidney conditions, such as anaemia, high blood pressure, or if it's affecting your bone health

People with end-stage CKD may need to go on dialysis or have a kidney transplant.

However, this is for the more severe cases, and most people are able to control their condition themselves with medicine and positive lifestyle changes.

What can I do?

Staying healthy and keeping your blood pressure under control is a very important part of managing your condition. The following lifestyle tips are recommended for people with kidney conditions:



Stop smoking, if you smoke

It is never too late to stop smoking, as health benefits can be gained from doing so at any age. Your GP or healthcare team will be able to provide support to help you quit.



Eat a healthy, balanced diet, with an emphasis on plant-based foods

It is best to eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, including pulses, with smaller amounts of animal protein sources, such as meat, fish and eggs. Foods high in unsaturated fats are better for your blood pressure than foods high in saturated fat. Try to avoid processed food and high sugar snacks or drinks.



Restrict your salt intake

Try and restrict your intake to less than 1 teaspoon (about 6g) per day. Remember, salt substitutes are not appropriate for people with kidney conditions as they contain high levels of potassium.



Exercise regularly

Try cycling, swimming or walking more, for example – aiming for at least 150 minutes (2.5 hours) a week. Exercising is beneficial for general health as well as kidney health.



Manage your alcohol intake

Although it's your liver that processes alcohol, drinking can also affect your kidney health, so try to keep below the recommended limit of 14 units a week.



Keep your weight at a healthy level

If you're overweight, losing weight can have many health benefits, including your kidney health.

Your GP or healthcare team will be able to provide information and support on any of these lifestyle factors – just ask them if you would like to know more.

Other medicines and CKD

If you have CKD, you may be asked to avoid taking over-the-counter drugs called NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), such as ibuprofen or muscle/joint pain relievers, as they can be harmful to the kidneys. This is dependent on your individual condition though, so check with your doctor to see if you can use these (or other) medicines safely.

Please seek medical advice if you become unwell with a fever, vomiting and/or diarrhoea. Dehydration can put added pressure on the kidneys, meaning you may need to stop taking some of your regular medicines until you recover. Your doctor can advise you on what you need to do based on the medicines you have been prescribed.

Further support

If you have been diagnosed with CKD, there are many sources of support for you and your family. Your GP or healthcare team will be able to answer any questions you may have, and there are trained counsellors or telephone helplines to discuss your condition, as well as further information online.

If you'd prefer to talk to someone:

National Kidney Federation **free helpline**

0800 169 09 36

Kidney Patient Guide **online forum**

www.kidneypatientguide.org.uk/BB.php

For online information and support:

Kidney Care UK

www.kidneycareuk.org

National Kidney Federation

www.kidney.org.uk

National Health Service

www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-disease/

More information is available on the Trust website: www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

Produced by: Renal Medicine, April 2020. Review due: April 2022