

# Chronic Kidney Disease

A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS

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## What is chronic kidney disease (CKD)?

Kidneys are as important to your health as your heart or your lungs. Shaped like kidney beans and about the size of your fist, your kidneys are located on either side of your spine under the lower ribs. Their main task is to remove waste products from your blood. Your kidneys also produce important hormones that regulate some of your body's functions and help balance water and minerals in your body.

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) refers to a medical condition where your kidneys' ability to filter wastes from your body is impaired. 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, treatment options include dialysis or a kidney transplant. These treatments can help you stay healthy and continue your daily activities.

There is no cure for CKD – the goal of treatment is to keep the kidneys functioning as long as possible by detecting and treating the disease at its early stages. Sometimes, if treated early, all that may be needed is a change in your diet, control of your blood pressure and/or some specific medication.

## What are the symptoms of kidney disease?

CKD is a silent disease. Most people do not have any symptoms in the early stages. Symptoms begin when most of your kidney function is lost. Symptoms that may show up as your kidney function deteriorates include frequent headaches, fatigue, and itching all over the body.

As kidney disease worsens, the body is unable to get rid of waste products and excess water. This condition is called uremia. In addition to earlier symptoms, you may experience:

- Frequent urination or passing less urine
- Swelling in legs, ankles, feet, face, and/or hands
- Metallic or bad taste in mouth
- Nausea and vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling cold
- Trouble concentrating, dizziness
- Leg pain/muscle cramps

## Who is at risk of developing CKD?

The leading causes of kidney failure are **diabetes** and **high blood pressure**. These conditions interfere with the filtering ability of the kidneys 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 doctor 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 (First Nations, Pacific Islanders)
- Overuse of anti-inflammatory drugs and pain-killers
- Infection or injury to the kidneys (e.g. glomerulonephritis)

## 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. Consider using the *Chronic Kidney Disease Flow Sheet* to monitor your progress. You can take this flow sheet with you when you visit your doctor. Other important things you can do include:

- **Control diabetes**

If you have diabetes, keep your blood glucose levels as close to normal as possible. Along with taking your medications as prescribed, keep your weight under control and exercise regularly. Your doctor should routinely test whether your kidneys are functioning properly.

- **Control high blood pressure (hypertension)**

High blood pressure causes kidney damage and will also cause kidney function to deteriorate more quickly. Control your high blood pressure to 130/80. Work with your doctor to find the anti-hypertension medications that work best for you. Keep your weight under control, exercise regularly, and reduce your salt intake to help keep your blood pressure at a healthy level.

- **Lead a smoke free life**

To help prevent kidney disease, stop smoking and avoid exposure to second hand smoke.

- **Eat well**

If you have CKD, it is important to have a diet that meets your nutritional needs. Learn how proper food choices can help you. Talk to a nutritionist or dietitian about a food plan that is right for you. Be aware that certain foods can cause kidney function to deteriorate more quickly. A diet that is too high in protein can cause problems.

- **Exercise and control your weight**

Exercising regularly is one of the best things you can do to improve your overall health. 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.

- **Do not overuse over-the-counter drugs**

Prolonged and frequent use of anti-inflammatory and anti-pain medications can damage your kidneys. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to find out how to use non-prescription medication that won't damage your kidneys.

- **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 and share your feelings with family and close friends. Consider joining a support group.

## 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.

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 on the Kidney Foundation web site:

[www.kidney.ca/publications-eng.htm](http://www.kidney.ca/publications-eng.htm)

It is also available in English, French, Chinese, Italian, Portuguese & Punjabi from the BC Branch.

### BC Provincial Renal Agency (BCPRA)

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

The BC Provincial Renal Agency is a collaborative of renal health professionals who coordinate the care of patients with kidney disease in BC.

### BC Health Guide

Information on kidney disease can be found in the BC HealthGuide Online at [www.bchealthguide.org](http://www.bchealthguide.org) or in the BC HealthGuide Handbook provided free to households throughout the province. The 24-Hour BC HealthGuide NurseLine puts you in touch with a Registered Nurse any time day or night just by calling one of the following numbers:

Local calling within Greater Vancouver:	604 215-4700
Toll-free elsewhere within BC:	1 866 215-4700
Deaf and hearing-impaired toll-free province wide:	1 866 TTY-4700