

Your Health: Your Risk of Kidney Disease



Anything that increases your chance of having a disease is called a risk factor. Any condition or disease that damages your kidneys can lead to kidney disease. Diabetes and high blood pressure are the leading risk factors for chronic kidney disease.

You cannot change some things that increase your chance of having kidney disease. For example, you have a higher risk of developing kidney disease if you are an older adult or have a family history of kidney disease.

Luckily, you can control other important risk factors, like diabetes and high blood pressure. Whatever your level of risk, there are steps you can take to lower your chance of having kidney disease.

What are the risk factors for chronic kidney disease?

The biggest risk factors are diabetes and high blood pressure.

- **Diabetes** causes high blood sugar. High blood sugar damages blood vessels in the kidneys.

- **High blood pressure** gradually damages the tiny blood vessels in the kidneys.

Your chance of having chronic kidney disease is also higher if:

- You have a family history of kidney disease.
- You have a kidney disease or infection or a kidney problem you were born with.
- You are of African-American or Native American descent.
- You often take medicines that can damage the kidneys. Examples include NSAIDs such as aspirin or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), and certain antibiotics. Illegal drugs can also damage your kidneys.
- You smoke or use other types of tobacco products. Tobacco use can reduce blood flow to the kidneys and increase blood pressure.

How can you lower your risk for chronic kidney disease?

If you have diabetes or high blood pressure, work closely with your doctor, and see a dietitian to learn the best way to eat. You can lower your risk for chronic kidney disease if you can control these conditions.

If you have diabetes, you will need to control your blood sugar levels.

To be successful:

- Follow an eating plan that spreads carbohydrate throughout the day.
- Get regular exercise.
- Check your blood sugar level at home.
- Take your medicine as prescribed.

If you have high blood pressure but no signs of kidney damage, you will need to keep your blood pressure below 140/90 mm Hg. If you have high blood pressure and also have diabetes

or signs of kidney disease, your blood pressure needs to be below 130/80 mm Hg.

To be successful:

- Take blood pressure medicine if your doctor prescribes it. It is very important to take these medicines just as your doctor tells you and to keep taking them. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.
- Follow an eating plan that can help lower your blood pressure.
- Get regular exercise.

There also are other steps you can take to help your kidneys stay healthy:

- Get some exercise every day. Exercise can help you lower your risk for many diseases, including diabetes and high blood pressure. It can also help you stay at a healthy weight and feel better.

- Avoid medicines that can damage your kidneys. Be sure that your doctor knows about all prescription, over-the-counter, and herbal medicines you are taking.
- Keep your cholesterol level lower than 200. If you have high cholesterol, your doctor may prescribe medicine and suggest that you cut back on saturated fat.
- Avoid dehydration. Be careful when you exercise or during hot weather. Get treatment right away for illnesses that can cause dehydration, such as diarrhea, vomiting, or fever.
- Do not smoke or use other tobacco products.
- Do not drink large amounts of alcohol or use illegal drugs, which can damage your kidneys.
- Limit how much sodium you have each day.

Questions to ask your doctor

List your questions or concerns below. Take this sheet with you to your next doctor visit.

Questions about risk factors for chronic kidney disease: