

About CKD

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a common long-term condition, usually affecting older people. It is estimated that about one in five men and one in four women between the ages of 65 and 74 has some degree of CKD.

A diagnosis of CKD means your kidneys are not working as effectively as they used to. The older you are the more likely you will have a degree of CKD. This can be caused by damage to the kidneys from other conditions – most often diabetes and high blood pressure.

CKD doesn't usually cause symptoms, especially in the early stages, and we detect it by routine blood and urine tests as part of the review of these conditions. A 2nd blood test and urine test are usually required to confirm the diagnosis.

Why do so many people have CKD?

Your kidneys are remarkable organs. They work every hour of everyday filtering blood to take out waste and converting it into urine. They do a number of other things too (see below) and they never stop working – they use 25% of your body's energy to do their job.

Many of us live a lot longer than we used to and so we are at the mercy of illnesses and conditions as we age. Chronic kidney disease can occur when the kidneys are less able to do their work long term. This can be caused by damage to the kidneys from other conditions – most often diabetes and high blood pressure. People with CKD may live an active and full life.

Living with CKD

A diagnosis of CKD is initially very concerning for the person and their family, though there is a lot of help, advice and support available, see below.

There is no proven cure for CKD but its progression can be slowed or halted:

- 1) Take care of your general health with a healthy diet, and regular exercise and avoiding excess alcohol and smoking will help to protect your kidneys.
- 2) If you have hypertension, diabetes or cardiovascular disease make sure you take your medication as prescribed and attend your regular checks to ensure your conditions are well controlled.
- 3) Avoid taking ibuprofen or aspirin as pain relief regularly as these can reduce kidney function.

- 4) People also need to be aware of other implications of CKD such as an increased risk of heart disease or the risk of a sudden decline in kidney function when unwell (acute kidney injury – see web link). It is very important that people with CKD have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to understand CKD and to be able to self-care or self-manage their condition. It is this that forms the basis of the Transforming Participation in Chronic Kidney Disease programme.

Taking care of yourself when you have CKD can become part of everyday life. Self-care means taking responsibility for your health and wellbeing with the support of the people who care for you – your family and friends and the clinicians you see – whether that is at your GP surgery or at the hospital clinic. This means the person with CKD looks after themselves every day – by doing the things that keep us fit and healthy – eating well, taking gentle exercise, preventing other illnesses or accidents and generally being mindful and taking care of their physical and mental wellbeing.

You can read more about [living with chronic kidney disease](#) here.

The main symptoms of advanced kidney disease include

- tiredness
- swollen ankles, feet, or hands (due to water retention)
- shortness of breath
- nausea
- blood in the urine
- anaemia

Read more about the [symptoms of chronic kidney disease](#).

Screening for CKD may be recommended by your GP or nurse if you have

- [high blood pressure](#) (hypertension)
- [diabetes](#)
- a family history of CKD

More about your kidneys (from [NHS Choices](#))

The kidneys are two bean-shaped organs, the size of your fist, located on either side of the body, just beneath the ribcage. The main role of the kidneys is to filter waste products from the blood before converting them into urine. The kidneys also:

- help maintain blood pressure
- maintain the correct levels of chemicals in your body which, in turn, will help heart and muscles function properly
- produce the active form of vitamin D that keeps bones healthy
- produce a substance called erythropoietin, which stimulates production of red blood cells

Read more about the [causes of chronic kidney disease](#).

Improving outcomes related to chronic kidney disease

The main way to reduce the chances of CKD developing is to ensure any existing conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, are carefully managed.

Some lifestyle changes can also reduce the risk of CKD developing, these include:

- having a healthy diet
- avoiding drinking excessive amounts of alcohol
- exercising regularly
- avoiding medicines that can damage the kidney

Read more about [preventing chronic kidney disease](#).