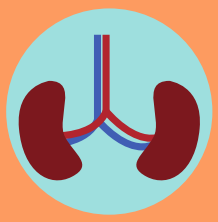
Chronic Kidney Disease

What do kidneys do?



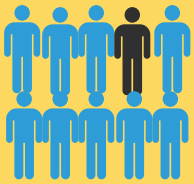
You have 2 bean-shaped, fist-sized organs, deep in your back either side of the spine. They...

Clean blood, removing excess water and waste as urine

Correct salt and chemical levels for proper heart and muscle function

Make hormones for healthy blood, bones and blood pressure

Break down medication



How common is it?

1 in 10 people have CKD

Within this statistic, many with CKD may not have 'diseased' kidneys, but normal ageing of their kidneys.

Most people with kidney disease will find it gets worse very slowly, if at all. Less than 1 in 10 people with CKD ever require dialysis (artificial kidney treatment) or a kidney transplant

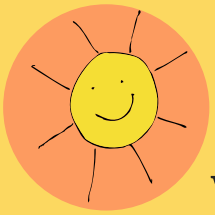
What does the term 'Chronic Kidney Disease' mean??

Kidney disease is a very general term used by healthcare professionals to suggest that the kidneys are not functioning correctly

'Chronic' means a condition that does get completely better. It sounds intimidating but often CKD is only a very slight abnormality

It's not possible to repair damage, but treatment prevents other serious conditions from developing. Many people live an active and full life

Symptoms: How will it make me feel?



Most people never develop any symptoms at all. This is because kidneys can still work when they are damaged

If symptoms do appear, they are vague and are often attributed to other illnesses such as colds or the 'flu'

For a very small numb of people, it may cause tiredness, poor appetite, loss of stamina, shortness of breath, and the need to urinate frequently. Others may have itchy skin, swollen ankles, difficulty sleeping at night, sickness or headaches

What causes Chronic Kidney Disease?

CKD often exists in combination with other long-term contributing conditions such as those affecting the blood vessels in the kidneys, particularly diabetes, high blood pressure and high cholesterol. Sometimes CKD is simply a result of naturally ageing kidneys

Testing for CKD: How do I know if I have chronic kidney disease?

- Kidney function is investigated by a simple blood test that measures the amount of creatinine (a waste chemical) cleared from the blood. This is called the estimated Glomerular Filtration Rate (eGFR).
- In CKD, GFR decreases as it is less able to filter blood. Although there can be a big variation in this value between individuals, it is adjusted for your age, sex, racial origin and body size.

- Urine tests measures the amount of protein present. Reducing the amount of protein in the urine can help slow kidney disease.
- Since very few causes of CKD are curable, it is often not necessary to do extensive tests to find this cause, so long as blood tests show the kidney function is stable. Very rarely, further tests will be done such as taking a biopsy to look at a small piece of kidney under a microscope

What stage of CKD do I have, and how is it treated?

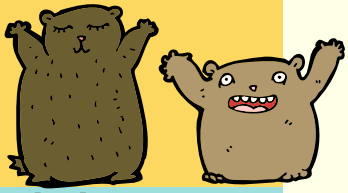
STAGE	DESCRIPTION	TREATMENT
1 GFR = 90+ mls/min	Normal kidney function	Observation, control of blood pressure to <130/80. Monitor cholesterol (control with daily aspirin tablets) and annual eGFR. Referral to kidney specialist if it is found that there is lots of protein are found in the urine, or that kidney function is declining over time.
2 GFR = 60-89 mls/min	Mildly reduced kidney function	
3 GFR = 30-59 mls/min	Moderately reduced kidney function	
4 GFR = 15-29 mls/min	Severely reduced kidney function	Referral to specialist kidney unit. Management of CKD complications such as anaemia. Review of medications for appropriate dose, and some drugs may need to be avoided as they could damage the kidneys further. This is when dialysis treatment or a kidney transplant may be required.
5 GFR = < 15 mls/min	End-stage kidney failure	

NB Less than 1 in 10 progress to the stage where kidneys can no longer maintain wellbeing

Often CKD can be managed by patients and their GPs with regular blood tests, blood pressure checks and a review of any symptoms, without ever needing to visit a hospital

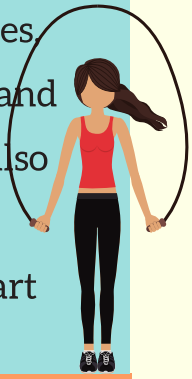
What Can I Do to Help Myself?

Even if your condition is mild, it's important to take good care of yourself to improve general overall health and reduce your risk of developing further problems



Eat a healthy diet low in salt and control your weight. Obesity leads to diabetes (Type 2), which is the most common recognised cause of kidney failure. If you do get diabetes, controlling it well may help the kidneys.

Exercise regularly. Exercise is good for anyone with kidney disease, however severe. Not only will it boost your energy, help you sleep, strengthen your bones, ward off depression and keep you fit, it may also reduce your risk of problems such as heart disease



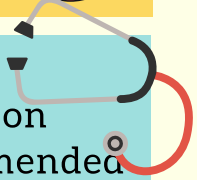
Stop smoking. Smoking furs up the blood vessel to the kidney, which can cause kidney failure. It similarly affects vessels to the heart and brain, causing heart attacks and strokes.

Consider buying a blood pressure monitor for regular measurements at home. You will need to take pills if it goes up above 140/85.

Make sure to attend your appointments at the surgery or clinic

Take all prescribed medication, even if you don't feel unwell as they may prevent future problems. Avoid painkillers called non-steroidal drugs, as these can worsen kidney function. Many have "fen" or "coxib" in their names such as Ibuprofen or Celecoxib. Instead, use a Paracetamol based painkiller

Avoid contact sports (e.g. rugby, karate) that might damage your kidneys



Questions to ask your doctor

- Ask about vaccinations - kidney disease can put a significant strain on your body and make you more vulnerable to infections. It is recommended to have the yearly 'flu' jab and the one-off pneumonia jab
- A slowly growing prostate gland can make passing urine difficult and can silently damage the kidneys over a period of years. Ask your doctor about having regular blood tests for kidney function
- Problems such as erectile dysfunction and reduced sex drive are also fairly common in people with kidney disease. Speak to your GP about available treatment and support.
- Screening: CKD does not normally run in families. However, if you have an inherited form of CKD you can check to see if family members need testing