

You are more likely to develop kidney disease if you have:

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- A family history of kidney failure

What can I do to keep my kidneys healthy?

You can protect your kidneys by preventing or managing health conditions that cause kidney damage, such as diabetes and high blood pressure. The steps described below may help keep your whole body healthy, including your kidneys.

During your next medical visit, you may want to ask your health care provider about your kidney health. Early kidney disease may not have any symptoms, so getting tested may be the only way to know your kidneys are healthy. Your health care provider will help decide how often you should be tested.

See a provider right away if you develop a urinary tract infection (UTI), which can cause kidney damage if left untreated.

Make healthy food choices

Choose foods that are healthy for your heart and your entire body: fresh fruits, fresh or frozen vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or fat-free dairy products. Eat healthy meals, and cut back on salt and added sugars. Aim for less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium each day. Try to have less than 10 percent of your daily calories come from added sugars.

Tips for making healthy food choices

- Cook with a mix of spices instead of salt.
- Choose veggie toppings such as spinach, broccoli, and peppers for your pizza.
- Try baking or broiling meat, chicken, and fish instead of frying.
- Serve foods without gravy or added fats.
- Try to choose foods with little or no added sugar.
- Gradually work your way down from whole milk to 2 percent milk until you're drinking and cooking with fat-free (skim) or low-fat milk and milk products.
- Eat foods made from whole grains—such as whole wheat, brown rice, oats, and whole-grain corn—every day. Use whole-grain bread for toast and sandwiches; substitute brown rice for white rice for home-cooked meals and when dining out.
- Read food labels. Choose foods low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.
- Slow down at snack time. Eating a bag of low-fat popcorn takes longer than eating a slice of cake. Peel and eat an orange instead of drinking orange juice.
- Try keeping a written record of what you eat for a week. It can help you see when you tend to overeat or eat foods high in fat or calories.

Research has shown that the DASH eating plan may help you lower your blood pressure. If you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease, you may want to locate and work with a dietitian to create a meal plan that meets your needs.

Make physical activity part of your routine

Be active for 30 minutes or more on most days. If you are not active now, ask your health care provider about the types and amounts of physical activity that are right for you. Add more activity to your life with these tips to help you get active.

Aim for a healthy weight

The NIH Body Weight Planner is an online tool to help you tailor your calorie and physical activity plans to achieve and stay at a healthy weight. If you are overweight or have obesity, work with your health care provider or dietitian to create a realistic weight-loss plan. View more weight control and physical activity resources to help you get and stay motivated.

Get enough sleep

Aim for 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night. If you have trouble sleeping, take steps to improve your sleep habits.

Stop smoking

If you smoke or use other tobacco products, stop. Ask for help so you don't have to do it alone. You can start by calling the national quitline at 1-800-QUITNOW or 1-800-784-8669. For tips on quitting, go to Smokefree.gov.

Limit alcohol intake

Drinking too much alcohol can increase your blood pressure and add extra calories, which can lead to weight gain. If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to one drink per day if you are a woman and two drinks per day if you are a man. One drink is:

- 12 ounces of beer
- 5 ounces of wine
- 1.5 ounces of liquor

Explore stress-reducing activities

Learning how to manage stress, relax, and cope with problems can improve emotional and physical health. Physical activity can help reduce stress, as can mind and body practices such as meditation, yoga, or tai chi.

Manage diabetes, high blood pressure, and heart disease

If you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease, the best way to protect your kidneys from damage is to

Keep blood glucose numbers close to your goal. Checking your blood glucose, or blood sugar, level is an important way to manage your diabetes. Your health care team may want you to test your blood glucose one or more times a day.

Keep your blood pressure numbers close to your goal. The blood pressure goal for most people with diabetes is below 140/90 mm Hg. Read more about high blood pressure.

Take all your medicines as prescribed. Talk with your health care provider about certain blood pressure medicines, called ACE inhibitors and ARBs, which may protect your kidneys. The names of these medicines end in –pril or –sartan.

Be careful about the daily use of over-the-counter pain medications. Regular use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen and naproxen , can damage your kidneys. Learn more about over-the-counter medicines and your kidneys.

To help prevent heart attacks and stroke, keep your cholesterol levels in the target range. There are two kinds of cholesterol in your blood: LDL and HDL. LDL or “bad” cholesterol can build up and clog your blood vessels, which can cause a heart attack or stroke. HDL or “good” cholesterol helps remove the “bad” cholesterol from your blood vessels. A cholesterol test also may measure another type of blood fat called triglycerides.

Ask your health care provider questions

Ask your health care provider the following key questions about your kidney health during your next medical visit. The sooner you know you have kidney disease, the sooner you can get treatment to help protect your kidneys.

Key questions for your health care provider:

- What is my glomerular filtration rate (GFR)?
- What is my urine albumin result?
- What is my blood pressure?
- What is my blood glucose (for people with diabetes)?
- How often should I get my kidneys checked?

Other important questions:

- What should I do to keep my kidneys healthy?
- Do I need to be taking different medicines?
- Should I be more physically active?
- What kind of physical activity can I do?
- What can I eat?
- Am I at a healthy weight?
- Do I need to talk with a dietitian to get help with meal planning?
- Should I be taking ACE inhibitors or ARBs for my kidneys?
- What happens if I have kidney disease?