

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE

In the Clinic  
Annals of Internal Medicine

## What Is Chronic Kidney Disease?

The kidneys play an important role in keeping the body healthy. They remove waste from the body, balance blood pressure, make important hormones, and help keep bones strong. With chronic kidney disease (CKD), the kidneys gradually stop working. CKD can cause other health problems, like:

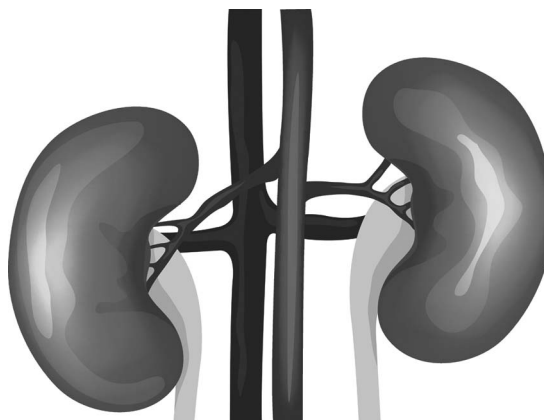
- Heart disease
- Weak bones
- Nerve damage
- Fluid buildup
- Weakened immune system
- Other health problems

CKD is most often caused by diabetes or high blood pressure, but other factors can cause the kidneys to stop working.

## What Are the Warning Signs of CKD?

Many people with CKD will not notice symptoms until late in the disease. These symptoms can include:

- Trouble sleeping and tiredness
- Trouble concentrating
- Feeling sick to your stomach or throwing up
- Muscle cramping
- Having no appetite
- Itching
- Swelling in your feet, ankles, or around your eyes



## How Is CKD Diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask you about your medical history and any other health problems you have and measure your blood pressure. Your doctor also will check your blood and urine.

## How Is CKD Treated?

Treating CKD early can prevent or slow down more damage to the kidneys so that your kidneys keep working. Treatment can include:

- Taking medicine to treat diabetes, high blood pressure, or other health problems that are damaging your kidneys
- Avoiding cigarettes and drugs that may harm your kidneys
- Following a healthy diet and exercising regularly

If your kidneys stop working, dialysis treatment may be needed. Dialysis involves using a tube to connect your body to a dialysis machine for several hours a day on several days each week. The dialysis machine will do some of the work that healthy kidneys do, like removing waste and extra fluids from the body. If your kidneys stop working, kidney transplantation also may be an option.

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## Questions for My Doctor

- How can I stop kidney disease from getting worse?
- What is the best treatment for my chronic kidney disease?
- How does my diabetes or high blood pressure hurt my kidneys?
- Will I ever need dialysis or a kidney transplant?
- Do I need to change my diet or alcohol intake?
- Can I still take the medicines I normally take?
- Are there activities I should avoid?

## Bottom Line

- The kidneys are important for keeping the body healthy. With CKD, the kidneys gradually stop working.
- Symptoms of CKD are often not noticed until late in the disease.
- Tests of the blood and urine can help diagnose CKD.
- Treatment includes taking medicine and managing the health problems that damage the kidneys. Dialysis and a kidney transplant are options for people whose kidneys stop working.

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## For More Information



**National Kidney Foundation**  
[www.kidney.org/kidneydisease/aboutckd](http://www.kidney.org/kidneydisease/aboutckd)  
**National Kidney Disease Education Program**  
[www.nkdep.nih.gov](http://www.nkdep.nih.gov)  
**American Association of Kidney Patients**  
[www.aakp.org](http://www.aakp.org)