



What you need to know about chronic kidney disease

Your kidneys work hard

Kidneys help your body stay in balance. You have two kidneys, each about the size of a closed fist, located in your back on either side of your spine just below your ribcage. Each kidney contains about one million tiny filtering units called nephrons. Your kidneys:

- Remove waste and extra fluid from your body (this is what makes urine)
- Balance your body's minerals and electrolytes, including potassium, sodium, calcium and phosphorus
- Make hormones to:
 - control blood pressure
 - help make red blood cells
 - keep bones strong.

What is chronic kidney disease?

With kidney disease, your kidneys are damaged and not working as well as they should. With **chronic** kidney disease (CKD) damage has been happening for at least three months.

Kidney disease attacks and damages the nephrons, making it hard for the kidneys to get rid of wastes and fluid. Nephron damage can happen fast or it can take years.

CKD has five stages, depending on the amount of kidney damage. Not everyone moves from stage one to stage five. At stage five, or end-stage kidney disease, people need dialysis or a transplant to stay alive. There is no cure for chronic kidney disease, but it's possible to prevent it or slow down how fast the damage happens.

What are the signs?

Often, there are no signs or symptoms of kidney disease until your kidneys are working at less than 30 per cent of normal. This is especially true for people with diabetes. However, be on the lookout for:

- High blood pressure
- Puffy eyes, hands or feet
- Urine that is bloody, cloudy, tea-colored or really foamy
- Urinating more often during the night
- Passing less urine or having trouble urinating
- Loss of appetite or weight
- Constant itching all over the body
- Fatigue and trouble concentrating
- Unexplained shortness of breath
- Muscle cramping at night.

Who is at risk?

- People with diabetes
- Individuals with high blood pressure
- People with vascular disease or who have had a heart attack, stroke, high cholesterol, limb amputation, etc.
- People with a family history of kidney disease
- Individuals of Aboriginal, Hispanic, Asian or African descent
- Individuals 55 years of age or older
- People who smoke or use tobacco products
- People who use high amounts of certain over-the-counter medications, herbs and prescription medications, such as anti-inflammatory medication



For more information, contact the Kidney Health Community Program:

CKD Clinic, 3rd Floor, St. Paul's Hospital, 1702-20th Street West, Saskatoon, SK S7M 0Z9

Kidney Health Community Nurse Clinician: 306-655-5312

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What are the causes?

Diabetes and high blood pressure are the main causes of CKD. With diabetes, high blood sugar can damage the small blood vessels and nephrons in your kidneys. Other causes of CKD include glomerulonephritis, polycystic kidney disease, urinary tract blockage, reflux nephropathy and drug or medication-induced kidney problems.

What should you ask your doctor?

- Have my kidneys been checked recently?
- What were my results? At what percentage are my kidneys working?
- What can I do to keep my kidneys healthy?
- Is there anyone else I should be talking to about my kidney health?

What can you do now?

1. Monitor your blood pressure.

Find out what your blood pressure is. Normal blood pressure is 120/80. Know what a good blood pressure is for you.



2. Control your blood sugar levels.

If you have diabetes, control your blood sugar levels. Aim for levels between 4 to 7 before meals, and less than 10 two hours after a meal. A good A1C (how well your blood sugar levels have been for the last three months) is less than seven per cent.



3. Eat healthy.

Reduce salt in your diet. Don't add salt to food and choose fewer salty foods. Salty foods include deli meats, canned and instant foods and sauces, pickles, soya sauce, fast foods and salted snack foods like chips, nuts, crackers and pretzels. Aim for two to three servings of lean meats and proteins per day. A serving is about the size of a deck of cards.



4. Be active.

Increase your physical activity. This includes walking, swimming, dancing or biking. Start small and build up slowly. Work towards 30 minutes of activity each day.



5. Be smoke free.

If you smoke, quit. There are lots of tools available to help you.



6. Be careful with pills.

Learn about your medications — what they are and how to take them. If you are having trouble taking them, talk to your doctor or pharmacist.



7. Learn more.

Find out what you can do to keep your kidneys healthy and then pick some things you can work on.

