

# Get kidney fit.

A guide to your kidneys,  
and how to look after them.



Kidney disease ends here.

**This booklet will help you understand more about your kidneys and what you can do to look after them. At Kidney Research UK, we describe this as getting 'kidney fit'.**

Everyone should look after their kidney health, but getting kidney fit is especially important if you know you're at medium or high risk of kidney problems. Or if test results have shown that your kidney function has declined.

If you already have established kidney disease, you should follow the advice given by your healthcare professional about living with your condition.



# What do kidneys do?

**Your kidneys are vital for the health of your whole body, from your heart and skin to your bones, blood and digestive system.**

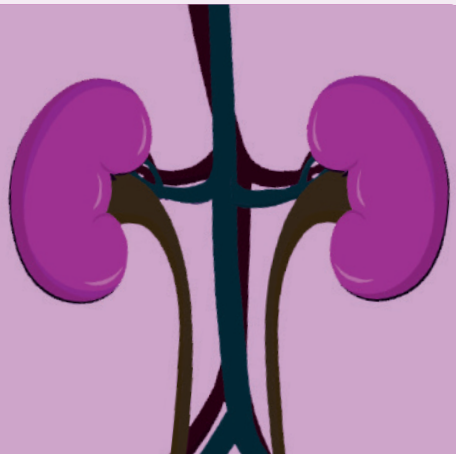
Their main job is to filter your blood, day and night, removing toxins, waste products and excess fluid. They get rid of these from your body as urine.

Your kidneys have a crucial role in regulating your blood pressure. They also boost red blood cell production, release a number of essential hormones back into your bloodstream, and activate vitamin D to help keep your bones and muscles in good shape.

With such important jobs in the body, if your kidneys stop working properly it takes a huge toll on your health.

**Did you know  
your kidneys clean  
your blood 40  
times every day?!**

- Your kidneys are about the size of your fist and shaped like a bean. A kidney bean!
- They sit deep in your tummy at the small of your back. One either side of your spine.
- Most of us have two kidneys, but you can live a normal life with just one healthy kidney.



# Kidney disease

**Kidney disease occurs when the kidneys stop working properly. This causes harmful waste products to build up in the body, which damage the organs and tissues. It can happen to anyone at any age.**

There is no cure for kidney disease. Left unchecked, it can develop into kidney failure, which is fatal. To survive, patient must have lengthy dialysis several times a week which can be restrictive and life limiting. Or they must have a kidney transplant for which there is a long waiting list, and which is unlikely to last forever.

## Are you at risk?

Over the page we set out the day-to-day ways you can get kidney fit and reduce your risk of kidney disease. These are especially important if you have one or more of the factors that are known to increase the risk of kidney disease:



**diabetes**, especially if it's not well controlled



**high blood pressure**, especially if it's not well controlled



**heart** and circulatory disease



**obesity** or being overweight



**a family history** of kidney problems



being from a **Black, or South Asian** background



**a history of kidney stones** or bladder and prostate problems



**if you regularly take some types of medication**, including non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, like ibuprofen



being a **smoker**

Find out your risk of kidney disease using our FREE online health check:

**[www.kidneyresearchuk.org/kidneyhealthcheck](http://www.kidneyresearchuk.org/kidneyhealthcheck)**

## What are the symptoms?

We describe kidney disease as 'silent' because it often has no symptoms at first. Many people don't notice anything is wrong until the disease is quite advanced. Some of the symptoms you need to look out for are:



Itchy skin



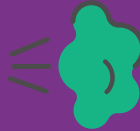
Feeling tired



Feeling sick



Finding it difficult to **concentrate**



Unusually **breathless** upon exertion



Poor appetite and **weight loss**

## How is it diagnosed?

Your kidney function can be checked, and kidney disease can be spotted, with simple blood and urine tests. If the disease is caught early, medicines and lifestyle changes can slow its progress.

However, because kidney disease is usually 'silent' in the early stages, it is often missed until irreversible damage has been done. That's why, if your risk is high, it's a good idea to have your kidney function checked regularly by your GP.

Every day

**20 people** are diagnosed with kidney failure

There are estimated to be **7.2 million** people in the UK currently living with chronic kidney disease.



For more detailed information about living with kidney disease visit:  
[www.kidneyresearchuk.org/living-with-kidney-disease](http://www.kidneyresearchuk.org/living-with-kidney-disease)

# Get kidney fit!

Looking after your kidneys may not be something you've ever really thought about before.

You might not know where to start. Don't worry. There are small and simple things you can do every day to get your kidneys fit and reduce your risk of kidney disease. Take the seven steps on the following pages, and you'll be on the road to kidney fitness.



## Cut the salt

Adults should have no more than six grams of salt a day, which is about a teaspoon. But it can be difficult to keep track, because your biggest salt intake may be in ready-made or processed foods, including ready prepared meals, processed meats, tinned and fresh soups, and take-aways.

Cook from scratch when you can, using herbs and spices to flavour food, and don't add extra salt at the table. Even small changes will have a huge benefit.

**Why?** Reducing the amount of salt in your diet lowers blood pressure, reduces inflammation and makes your blood vessels healthier. All of this is beneficial for the kidneys and makes you less likely to develop kidney disease.



## Eat for a healthy weight



As well as limiting your salt intake, your overall diet should help you reach and maintain a healthy weight. Include a wide variety of foods, with plenty of fruits and vegetables.

**Why?** Your diet has a big effect on your weight. People who are significantly overweight – with a body mass index of 30 or more – are three times more likely to develop kidney disease in their lifetime.

## Be active



Taking regular exercise is a big winner for your kidneys. Adults should aim for 150 minutes each week, such as 30 minutes on five days. Try to do exercise that builds strength twice a week, like gardening, walking or swimming. Any exercise is better than none.

**Why?** Exercise cuts your chances of developing conditions that put your kidneys at risk: obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. Research in older men has shown that for every 10 minutes of moderate or vigorous activity they did per day, their likelihood of having kidney disease fell by 13%.

## Quit smoking



Still smoking? Looking after your kidneys is one more good reason to quit.

**Why?** Smoking slows the flow of blood to the kidneys, making it harder for them to work properly. It also causes surges in blood pressure, which is bad for the kidneys, and increases the risk of kidney cancer by about 50 per cent.

## Drink enough



Stay hydrated and make sure you drink when you are thirsty. Water is healthy and cheap, but you could also include no-added-sugar squashes and sparkling water in your total intake. Avoid excess alcohol.

**Why?** Drinking plenty of fluids helps the kidneys do their job of clearing toxins and waste products from the body. Excess alcohol can raise your blood pressure, which in turn harms your kidney function. High blood pressure is one of the most common causes of kidney disease.

## Be mindful of medication



It's important to take any prescribed medicines as advised by your doctor. But be careful not to overdo common over-the-counter non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, like ibuprofen.

**Why?** This type of medicine is known to cause kidney damage and disease if taken regularly, so use them only occasionally. If you do rely on these medicines to manage chronic pain, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about alternatives that don't put your kidneys at risk, and get your kidney function checked regularly.

## Stay in control



If you have diabetes or high blood pressure, do your best to keep your weight healthy and take your medication as prescribed. Getting these conditions under control will make a big difference to your kidneys. Don't be afraid to ask your GP for a blood and urine test to check your kidney function, especially if you fall into any of the 'at risk' areas mentioned previously.

**Why?** Long-term high blood sugar and high blood pressure damages the vital blood vessels within the kidney. That's why diabetes and high blood pressure are the most common causes of kidney disease. Almost four in five people with diabetes will develop kidney problems during their lifetime.

As the leading kidney research charity in the UK, nothing is going to stop us in our urgent mission to end kidney disease. We're here to be heard, to make a difference, to change the future. This is a disease that destroys lives. It must be stopped.

Over the past 60 years, our research has made an impact. But kidney failure is rising, as are the factors contributing to it, such as diabetes and obesity. **Today, we are more essential than ever.**

There are estimated to be 7.2 million people in the UK currently living with chronic kidney disease, treatments can be gruelling and currently there is no cure. Only research will end this and nobody can do it but us, by offering kidney patients and their families hope for the future. We're taking it on. **But we can't do it without you.**

Check your risk of kidney disease at:

 [www.kidneyresearchuk.org/kidneyhealthcheck](https://www.kidneyresearchuk.org/kidneyhealthcheck)

To find out how you can get involved or donate to Kidney Research UK, visit:

 [www.kidneyresearchuk.org](https://www.kidneyresearchuk.org)  **0300 303 1100**

**References:**

1. [www.thinkkidneys.nhs.uk/aki/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/07/Your-kidneys-are-amazing.pdf](https://www.thinkkidneys.nhs.uk/aki/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/07/Your-kidneys-are-amazing.pdf)
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