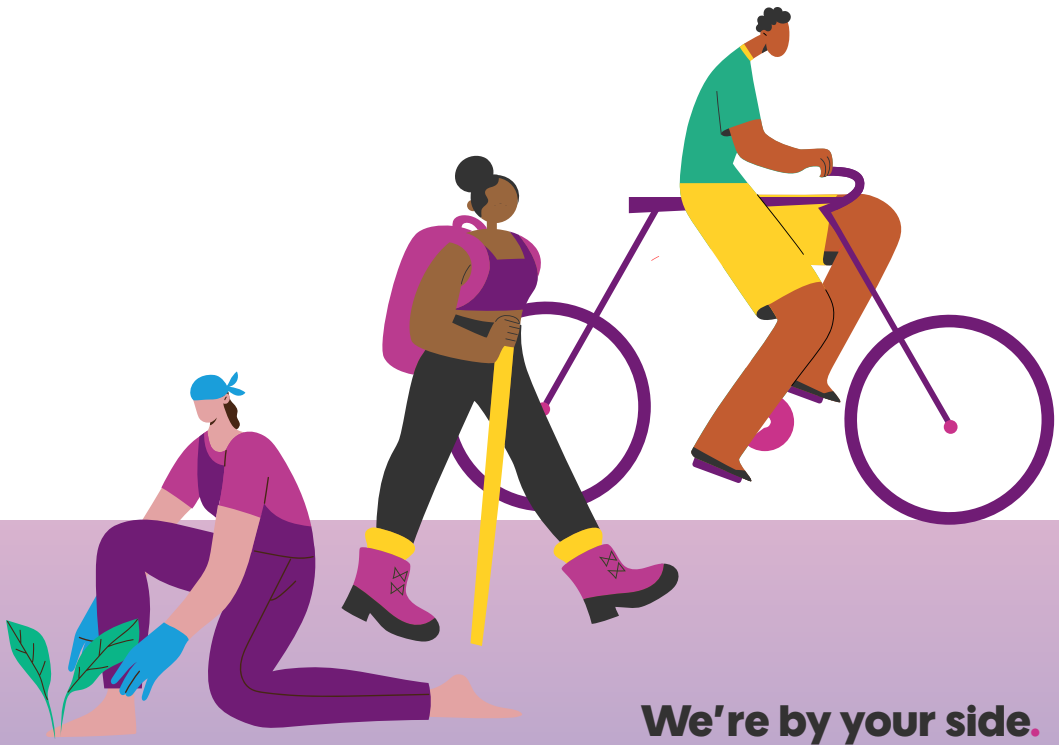
Kidney Research UK

Get kidney fit.

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



We're by your side.

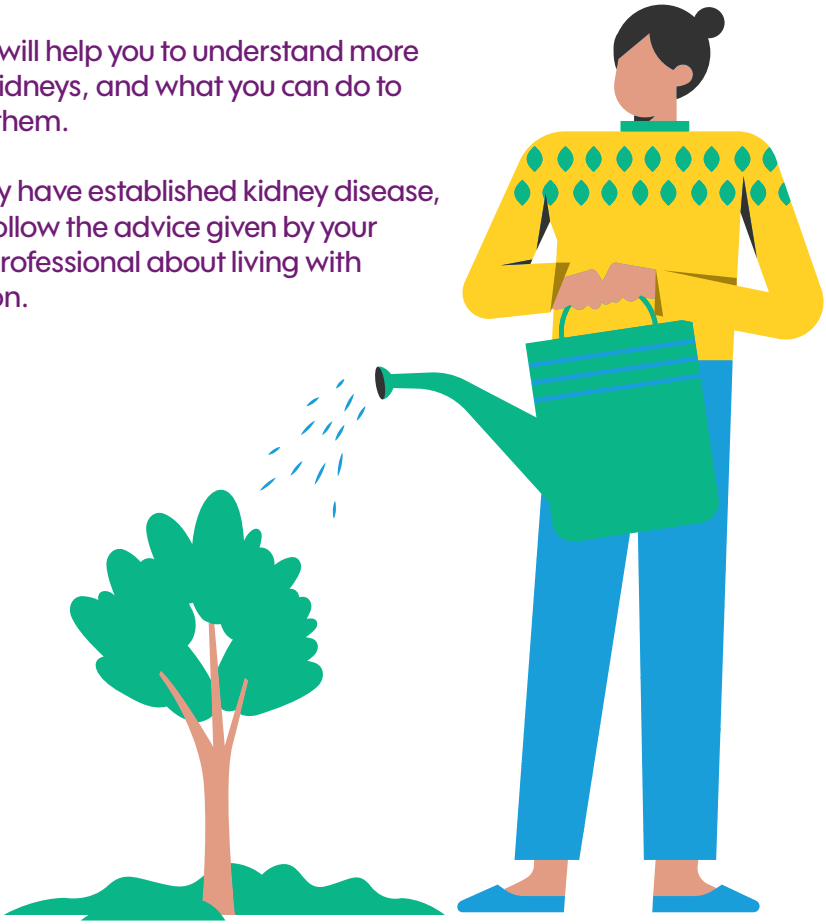
At Kidney Research UK, we're by your side – just like your kidneys.

More than 80% of people don't know where their kidneys are, yet we can't live without them.

Your kidneys are just as vital as your heart. They clean your blood 40 times a day. Once damaged they don't repair – but early detection of kidney disease can slow progression.

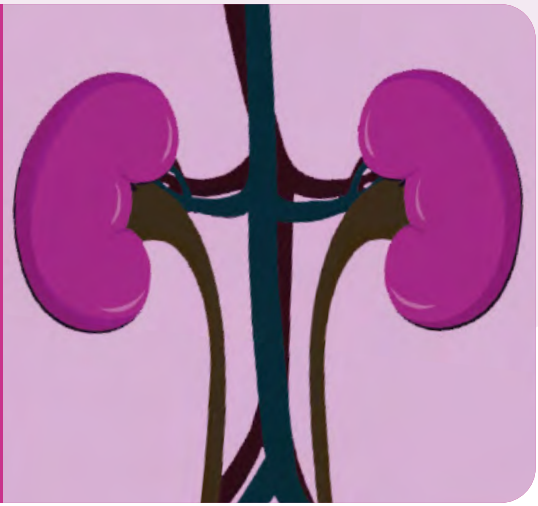
This booklet will help you to understand more about your kidneys, and what you can do to take care of them.

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



What are your kidneys and what do they do?

- Our 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. Some may have been born with one kidney, others may have had a kidney removed due to illness or injury and some people may have donated one of their kidneys to someone with kidney failure (in a kidney transplant operation).



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?

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, patients 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
- **heart** and circulatory disease
- **a family history** of kidney problems
- **a history of kidney stones** or bladder and prostate problems
- being a **smoker**
- **high blood pressure**, especially if it's not well controlled
- having **overweight**
- being from a **Black**, or **South Asian** background
- **if you regularly take some types of medication**, including non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, like ibuprofen

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

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.

Feeling **sick**

Feeling **tired**

Itchy skin

Swollen ankles, feet or hands

Difficulty **concentrating**

Unusually out of **breath**

Poor **appetite** and **weight** loss

Increased need to **urinate**

Protein or blood **in your urine**

For more detailed information about living with kidney disease visit:

www.kidneyresearchuk.org/what-the-kidneys-do

Stages of kidney disease.

There are various stages of chronic kidney disease (CKD), ranging from mild loss of kidney function to complete kidney failure, but not all CKD conditions progress to the most serious stage.

If you have CKD your doctor should regularly test your urine and blood to find out if there is any kidney damage, how serious the condition is, whether it is getting worse and what treatments you might need to manage your symptoms.

Stages of chronic kidney disease		% of kidney function	Symptom/implication
STAGE 1	Kidney damage with **normal** kidney function	100-90%	People in early-stage CKD may not know they have CKD as they often feel well and show no symptoms.
STAGE 2	Kidney damage with **mild loss** of kidney function	89-60%	
STAGE 3a	**Mild to moderate** loss of kidney function	59-45%	People are often diagnosed with kidney disease in the mid-stage, with many people still asymptomatic as waste in the body builds and blood pressure rises .
STAGE 3b	**Moderate to severe** loss of kidney function	44-30%	
STAGE 4	**Severe** loss of kidney function	29-15%	
STAGE 5	Kidney failure	Less than 15%	Patients with kidney failure require dialysis or a kidney transplant to stay alive. A proportion of people with kidney failure will not receive either dialysis or transplant, instead undergoing conservative care.

1 in 10 people have chronic kidney disease, but 50% don't know.

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

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How is it diagnosed?

Your kidney function can be checked, and kidney disease can be spotted, with simple blood and urine tests. Detecting kidney disease earlier can mean your doctor can prescribe treatments which can help maintain your kidney function for as long as possible. Early diagnosis of CKD can also give you the opportunity to make lifestyle changes and manage other health conditions, such as high blood pressure (hypertension) and diabetes, that may contribute to kidney damage.

However, because kidney disease is usually 'silent' in the early stages, it is often missed until irreversible damage has been done. Awareness and regular health checks are valuable tools in preventing or slowing kidney disease from progressing to more severe stages, including kidney failure, which may require dialysis or transplantation.

There are estimated to be

7.2 million

people in the UK currently living with chronic kidney disease.

Almost

every hour,

someone starts treatment for kidney failure.

For more information about how kidney disease is diagnosed visit:

www.kidneyresearchuk.org/how-is-kidney-disease-diagnosed

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.

Check your salt intake

Most of the salt we eat is contained in the food we buy — especially processed foods and ready-made meals — so:

- Use the traffic light food labelling system to help you choose healthier green-labelled options. The system highlights salt, fat and sugar content per 100g or per portion of food. But your portions may be different so try to estimate the overall salt content of your meal.
- Be wary of 'reduced salt' labels as some foods may still have higher than recommended salt levels or contain potentially harmful salt substitutes.

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.

How can I help myself?

Whatever your stage of kidney disease, it's important that you:

- Have a healthy diet (containing a wide variety of foods)
- Keep to a healthy weight and exercise regularly.
- If you want If you want to observe a period of fasting e.g. as part of your religion. It is important to have a plan to help you fast safely; if you have a healthcare team they can help you develop this.

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.

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.

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. Approximately one in three patients with diabetes will go on to develop kidney disease.

Hydration for kidney health

Fluid intake is important — whatever the weather. Here are seven top tips to help you ensure that you're drinking enough each day:

Top tips to avoid dehydration

- Whilst all fluid counts towards your fluid intake, water is one of the healthiest choices when it comes to maintaining kidney health.
- Sip water little and often.
- Woman should aim to drink eight 200ml glasses of fluid a day.
- Men should aim to drink ten 200ml glasses of fluid a day.
- During warmer weather conditions or when exercising strenuously you may need to drink more water than normal, due to the fluid loss though sweating.
- Track your urine colour — this should be straw coloured or paler. If it is any darker, it is an indicator that you could be dehydrated.
- Keep a bottle of water handy when you are on the move or exercising.

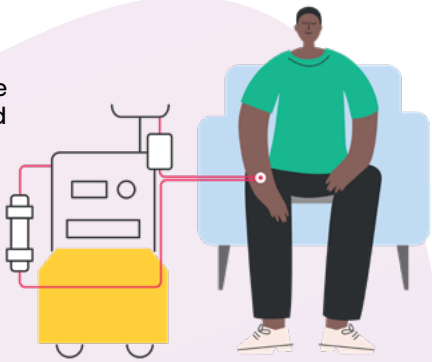
If you have kidney disease, always speak to your health professionals before making any dietary changes.

Are you on dialysis?

If you're on dialysis your daily fluid allowance is likely to be very restricted. Taking in too much fluid can cause problems ranging from weight gain and swelling to fluid in the lungs and heart problems.

It can help to stick to pure water and avoid caffeinated, sweetened and alcoholic drinks which require even more fluid to allow the body to properly process the toxins and chemicals they contain. Other tips can include chewing ice or enjoying frozen fruits (remembering to measure their likely fluid content) and limiting your salt intake.

Do ask your healthcare team if it's possible to adjust your dialysis solutions if you feel dehydrated during dialysis itself.



Already diagnosed with kidney disease?

We're by your side, every step of the way.

Join Kidney Community!

Sign up to a new **online forum** created to provide a welcoming, safe space for people to share their experiences of kidney disease. Ask questions, find information and connect with people who truly get it.

kidneycommunity.kidneyresearchuk.org

Get your Kidney Kit today!

We've put together this nutrition and exercise advice pack to support you. Filled with delicious recipes, tips and support from kidney patients, access to simple kidney patient exercise plans and much more.

All of the information in this pack was created by experts and Kidney Research UK. It's trustworthy, accurate and will benefit your kidneys!

To request your FREE kidney kit, visit our website at:
www.kidneyresearchuk.org/kidney-kit

Kidney Research UK

Kidney disease is growing in the UK at an alarming rate, devastating lives and threatening to overwhelm our NHS.

As the leading kidney research charity in the UK, we've been by the side of people living with kidney disease for 60 years and counting. We fund research that brings hope for tomorrow, while raising awareness, campaigning for equal treatment and helping people affected to live their best lives.

Today we are more essential than ever. Only our research can end kidney disease.

Through the heartbreaks and the breakthroughs, we're by your side.

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

www.kidneyresearchuk.org **0300 303 1100**

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Registered charity no. 252892. Registered Scottish charity no. SC039245.
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