

# Kidney disease and diabetes:

why you need to treat your kidneys with kindness

## What signs should I watch for?

Early kidney disease has no symptoms.

As kidney disease gets worse, you may notice the following:

*Swelling in your hands, feet, or legs*

*Sleep problems*

*Low appetite*

*Upset stomach*

*Weakness*

*Trouble focusing*

High blood sugar can cause problems for many parts of your body, including your kidneys. About 2 or 3 of every 10 people with diabetes will get kidney disease. If you are Hispanic, African American, or Native American, your risk is much higher. But anyone with diabetes can be at risk.

Without the right care, kidney disease can get worse until the kidneys just stop working. Because you cannot live without your kidneys, it is very important to keep them healthy. The good news is that most of the time, you can prevent kidney disease. And if you find out that you have kidney disease early enough, you can stop it from getting worse.

## What do my kidneys do?

You need food and drink — and maybe medicine — every day to stay healthy. But food, drink, and medicine also create waste. That's where your kidneys come in. Your kidneys remove waste from your blood and make urine to remove it from the body.

Your kidneys also balance the amount of water and minerals in your body. This helps control your blood pressure. Your kidneys also signal your bone marrow to make new red blood cells. These red blood cells carry oxygen and nutrients to every part of your body.

## What does kidney disease do to the kidneys?

There are millions of filters in your kidneys. These filters remove waste but leave red blood cells and protein in the blood, where they belong. But high blood sugar can break down these filters until they cannot do their job as well.

When kidney disease starts, small amounts of protein may come out in your urine. You cannot see or feel it, but your healthcare provider can test your urine for it.

Without treatment, your kidneys will get worse. This is called diabetic nephropathy (pronounced *nef-ROP-uh-thee*). Once this happens, you are likely to get high blood pressure. If you already have high blood

pressure, it is likely to get worse. That's because it will be harder for your kidneys to control your body's fluid levels.



## How will I know if I have diabetic nephropathy?

In the beginning, kidney disease has no symptoms, but your healthcare provider can tell you if you have it. That's one reason why you need to keep your appointments with your healthcare provider.

## Why is diabetic nephropathy dangerous?

Having nephropathy increases the chance that you will get heart and blood vessel disease or even die from it. And if your nephropathy is not treated, your kidneys will get worse until they are able to do very little. This is called end-stage renal disease.

Once you have end-stage renal disease, there are only 2 ways to stay alive. One is to get a kidney transplant. The other is to have your blood filtered by a machine. This is called dialysis (pronounced *die-AL-uh-sis*).

Dialysis can help save your life, but it will also change your life. With some kinds of dialysis, you need to spend a few hours a few times a week hooked up to a machine. With another kind, you need to run a special liquid through a tube into your body a few times a day, every day.

Either way, dialysis means you will need to commit to a treatment schedule. And you will need to do this for the rest of your life.

There is no cure for kidney disease, but there is hope. **Remember, the earlier you find and treat kidney disease, the better your chances of staying healthy.** That's why it's so important to visit your healthcare provider regularly to control your diabetes.

## What can I do to prevent nephropathy or stop it from getting worse?

- **Keep your blood sugar under control.**
- **Keep your blood pressure low.** High blood pressure can lead to kidney disease or make it worse.
- **Lose weight if you are overweight.**
- **Avoid drinking alcohol and smoking.**
- **Exercise every day.** Talk to your healthcare provider before beginning any exercise program.
- **Visit your healthcare provider regularly.** Get screened for kidney disease, so you can catch problems early.
- **Follow your healthcare provider's advice.** Sometimes, changes to your diet, exercise, and medicine can help keep your kidneys healthy.

*The earlier you find and treat kidney disease, the better your chances of staying healthy.*

For more information, visit MerckSource™ at [www.mercksource.com](http://www.mercksource.com).

MerckSource is a trademark of Merck & Co., Inc.

Where patients come first  **MERCK**