

Preserving Your Kidneys

Things you can do

Class Goals

Understand how to protect your kidneys and preserve their function, which includes:

- 1. Keeping your blood pressure under control.**
- 2. Preventing bladder and kidney infections.**
- 3. Talking with your doctor before taking any medicines, including nonprescription medicines.**

Overview

Preserving your kidneys can keep you healthier. This can delay the need for dialysis.

Good blood pressure control is key. It is the most effective way to preserve your kidney function.

Many drugs, including nonprescription (over-the-counter) medicines, can harm your kidneys. Do not take any medicine until your kidney doctor tells you it is OK to take it.

Treat all infections quickly, especially bladder infections, to avoid kidney damage.

Factors that Most Affect Kidney Health

Most times, health is not impaired until the kidneys are filtering only 25% of what they usually do. Even when the kidneys are diseased, your health can be kept close to normal if the remaining kidney function is preserved.

Many factors influence the rate of kidney function decline. The 2 most important are:

- Controlling your blood pressure
- Avoiding substances that hurt your kidneys



Keeping your blood pressure under control is an important part of preserving your kidneys.

Control Your Blood Pressure

Studies on preventing kidney damage find that if blood pressure is:

- **Under good control** – kidney function is preserved for a longer time
- **Poorly controlled** – kidney function declines faster and dialysis is needed much sooner

It is **very** important to keep your blood pressure in a normal range. High blood pressure causes permanent damage to the small blood vessels in the kidneys. Have your blood pressure checked by your healthcare provider at each visit. (See Figure 19.) And, learn how to take your own blood pressure and check it every day.

Studies also show that the overall health of people with high blood pressure is not as good as those whose blood pressure is controlled. Keep your blood pressure in the normal range for your overall health and for your kidneys. Talk with your provider about what a normal blood pressure is for you.

Blood pressure control includes:

- Taking your blood pressure medicine as prescribed
- Eating a low-salt diet
- Getting regular exercise
- Not smoking
- Limiting your caffeine and alcohol intake



Figure 19: Have your blood pressure checked by your healthcare provider at each visit.

Medicines That Protect Your Kidneys

Some medicines can protect against certain kinds of kidney disease. Talk with your kidney doctor to learn more.

Avoid Substances That Can Harm Your Kidneys

Many substances can damage your kidneys. If your kidneys are healthy, some damage to them does not cause major problems. But, if you have kidney disease, any extra damage can be very harmful.

The substances that can damage your kidneys are:

- Drugs
- Contrast material (used in some imaging methods)
- Certain nutrients

Drugs

Drugs that the kidneys must rid the body of can cause kidney damage. These include over-the-counter medicines and prescription drugs.

When there is kidney failure, the kidneys take longer to get rid of many drugs. If the dose of the drug is not lowered, side effects of the drug can increase.

It is very important for people with kidney problems to talk with their doctors before taking any prescription or over-the-counter medicines. If a new drug is prescribed, it is also a good idea to remind all your healthcare providers (including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and dentists) about your kidney disease.

Contrast (X-ray Dye)

Some X-ray exams use a dye called *contrast* that is injected into the body. This contrast material can damage the kidneys. Steps can be taken to reduce this side effect of the dye.

Before you have any tests done, talk with your doctor about your kidney disease and the exams that use dye. This is even more important for people with diabetes and older people with heart problems.

Nutrition and Protein

There are different opinions about the effect that protein and some other nutrients in your diet have on your kidneys. To learn more, talk about this issue with a kidney doctor.

For most people, avoiding foods that are high in salt (sodium) is helpful. This is because eating too much salt can cause high blood pressure, increase the amount of fluid in the body, and damage the filters in the kidney.

Infections

Some infections can cause kidney damage. Severe bladder infections can lead to kidney infection. And, having many, repeated kidney infections can lead to kidney disease.

It is important to prevent bladder infections, and to treat at the first sign of infection. **Call your doctor right away if you have any of these symptoms:**

- Pain when you urinate
- Having to urinate more often than usual
- Burning when you urinate
- Urine that has a foul odor

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.
