

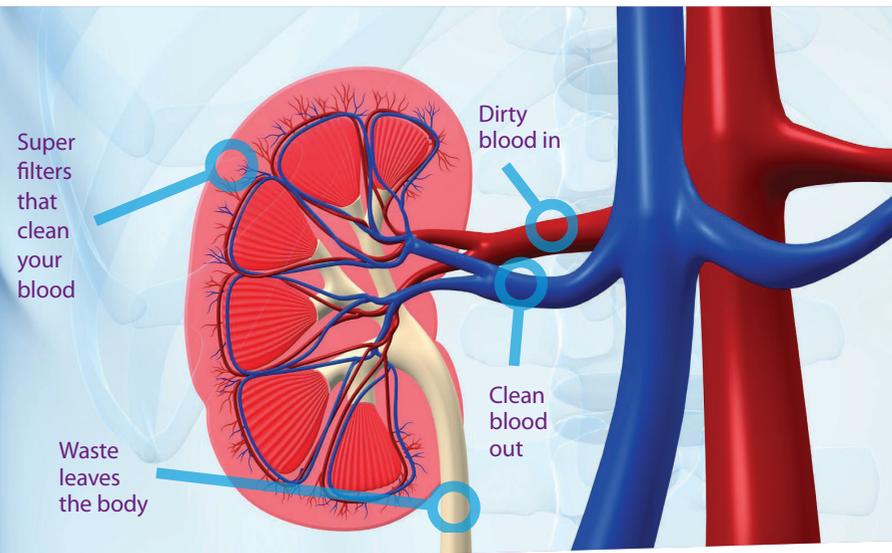


## Why are our kidneys so important?

They keep the whole body healthy and working...from the heart and skin, to the bones and digestive system.

They clean all your blood 40 times per day. They also regulate your blood pressure.

It's the most amazing organ in the human body!



## What is kidney disease?

In order to work properly, your kidneys need a constant supply of blood. The blood needs a system to clean it, a way for the cleaned blood to return to the rest of the body, and a way of allowing excess water and waste to firstly leave the kidney and then the body as urine. If just one of these processes is not working, urine is not produced by the kidneys and waste is not removed from the body properly. If this happens, the waste products can build up and your organs and tissues begin to be harmed. Eventually as this worsens it can become a serious illness generally known as 'chronic kidney disease' (CKD). There are many different causes of kidney disease.

Because the kidneys are so efficient it is usually a long time before there are obvious signs that something is wrong. Depending on the problem, early diagnosis and treatment can help slow down any damage to the kidneys. Left unchecked, however, some people go on to develop established renal failure, which is fatal without treatment by dialysis or a kidney transplant.

Research suggests that around 3 million people in the UK have some form of kidney disease. But up to a million of these people may be undiagnosed.

Kidney disease can affect anyone at any age.

**Fact: Your kidneys are amazing, they filter around 180 litres of blood every day!**

## Am I at risk of kidney disease?

Although kidney disease can affect anyone at any age, there are a few things that increase your risk:

- Diabetes\*
- High blood pressure\*
- Cardiovascular (heart) disease
- Family history of kidney disease
- South Asian or African-Caribbean ethnic background

\*It is more common if your blood pressure or diabetes haven't been well controlled as they should be.

Other less common causes include inflammation (glomerulonephritis) or infection (pyelonephritis). Sometimes kidney disease is inherited or the result of a longstanding blockage such as an enlarged prostate or kidney stones. Some drugs can cause kidney disease, especially certain pain-killing drugs (e.g. ibuprofen) if taken over a long time. Often it isn't possible to say what has caused the problem.

## What are the symptoms?

In most people, early stage kidney disease does not cause any obvious symptoms. Sometimes there are none at all until a few weeks before dialysis is needed. Symptoms that can occur in the later stages are:

- Feeling tired
- Difficulty concentrating
- Itchy skin
- Unusually breathless upon exertion
- Poor appetite and weight loss
- Feeling sick

## What happens when my kidneys stop working?

Chaos. Every cell in the body relies on your kidneys. When your kidneys stop working you can become critically ill.

## How do I find out if I have kidney disease?

Both blood and urine tests are used to diagnose kidney disease. A blood test called eGFR (estimated glomerular filtration rate) indicates roughly how well the kidneys are working to filter out waste from your blood and is often shown as a percentage of normal. A simple urine test or ACR (albumin to creatinine ratio) is performed to look for signs of protein as a way of checking how well the kidneys are working at keeping proteins in your blood and out of your urine.

## Why are blood and urine tests so important?

Kidney disease is a 'silent' disease because it displays few symptoms at early stages. However if kidney disease is caught early, medications and lifestyle changes can slow its progress and even stop or reverse kidney disease, depending on its cause.

## What can I do to help myself?

- Take regular exercise
- Keep your weight down
- Avoid excess salt and alcohol
- Don't smoke
- Keep your blood pressure in check

## Still worried?

Take our kidney health check:

[www.kidneyresearchuk.org/kidney-health-check](http://www.kidneyresearchuk.org/kidney-health-check)

Visit your doctor who can:

- Provide information to help you understand kidney disease
- Work with you to manage high blood pressure and diabetes
- Monitor your kidney function with regular blood and urine tests
- Check that the doses of your medicines don't need to be adjusted because of your kidneys
- Review your medication if you are unwell, as sometimes short-term changes to particular blood pressure tablets need to be made

Remember, all this is designed to protect the heart and circulation as well as the kidneys.

## Kidney Health Information

Our web-based Kidney Health information offers a wide range of information on kidney disease and treatments for kidney patients, their families and carers, as well as medical professionals and researchers.

- **Kidney health check** - Around 3 million people in the UK are under threat of kidney disease, many of these people are not aware they have the condition. Find out your level of risk by taking part in our free kidney health check.
- **Kidney information and kidney conditions** - This section covers all aspects of kidney disease with information on treatments and lifestyle.
- **Treatments and management** - Detailed information and guidance on the treatment options available, along with how to manage your condition.
- **Kidney patient stories** - Kidney disease can affect anyone of any age, including children. Some people are born with the condition, whilst others only discover years down the line that their kidneys have failed. Read stories about people who have lived first hand with the disease.
- **Frequently asked kidney health questions** - Have a kidney health question you need answering? Our FAQs page has a range of questions and answers that may help.
- **Further resources** - Here we have a host of additional resources to download or order. The selection of leaflets and DVDs contain information for both the healthcare professional and the patient.

To access all the information mentioned above visit:

[www.kidneyresearchuk.org/health-information](http://www.kidneyresearchuk.org/health-information)

or call: **0300 303 1100**

The website is not intended to provide personal medical advice, or act as a substitute for the advice of your doctor. If you have any questions or concerns about kidney health matters please consult a medical health professional. Always seek such advice before taking, or deciding not to take, any action as a result of information gathered from the Kidney Health Information website.

**Fact: The lives of more than 3 million people in the UK are at risk of kidney disease.**