

# Living Healthy with Kidney Disease

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This booklet covers:

- Coping with kidney disease
- Monitoring your kidney health



**Baxter**



## Living Healthy with Kidney Disease: Rise to the Challenge

If you have kidney disease, you probably have become familiar with the daily challenges that come with it. Some days, you may feel ready to take on the world, and other days, you may just want to stay under the covers and hide. This is a normal way to feel.

The good news is that kidney disease can be treated. Today, thousands of people with kidney disease are living active, happy lives. They are learning, as you are, to take an active role in managing their disease, feelings, and challenges they experience each day. They are not letting their kidneys keep them from living full lives — and neither should you.



## Feelings You May Experience

When you find out you have kidney disease, you may experience a range of emotions. Feelings of **shock** and **denial** are common first reactions when you are told your kidneys are not working properly, especially when physically you may feel fine at the time. **Fear**, **sadness**, and **grief** are also common feelings and may be signs that you are starting to understand your condition and adjust to life with kidney problems.

From time to time, you may feel **angry** with the people around you or with yourself. This too is normal and will pass once you realize that you are angry about your disease — not at the people who care about you. It's important that you let yourself experience these feelings as you learn to cope with your disease.

**Remember, over time YOU will have many options to consider. The choices and decisions will be YOURS to make, so speak with your nurse or doctor about how you are feeling.**



## Coping and Living Well with Kidney Disease

- Learn all you can about your disease
- Don't stop doing what you enjoy
- Write down questions to ask your healthcare team at office visits
- Do things that make you feel good but aren't bad for you
- Talk to a counselor or clergy member
- Talk to other people with kidney disease
- Share your feelings with your family and friends
- Spend time with people who make you feel better
- Try to keep a positive outlook on life because YOU do have treatment options to consider and choices to make that best fit with your lifestyle

**The decisions are YOURS to make!**



## Become a Partner with Your Healthcare Team to Get the Medical Care that is Best for You

Because your kidneys play such an important role in your body, your overall health can be affected when they are not working properly. Your renal team will regularly monitor your health and your kidney disease during routine office visits. It is important that you keep your scheduled appointments, ask questions, and take an active role in getting the care you need.

Kidney disease usually occurs slowly. You may not experience many symptoms at the beginning and you also may feel quite well — which makes changes in how you feel difficult for you to notice. Through regular testing, your care team can measure your kidney function, detect or prevent complications, such as anemia or bone disease, and monitor your blood pressure.

Your nurse will teach you about treatment options — make sure to take notes and ask questions so that you can make **YOUR** choice. The nurses and doctors will also work with you to make the best plan to manage **YOUR** disease that fits with your personal lifestyle and choice.

## Monitoring Your Kidney Health with Urine and Blood Testing

Your renal team will order routine urine and blood tests that help them assess how your kidneys are working.

For example, if your urine contains too much protein, your kidneys may not be working properly. If your urine doesn't have enough waste products, your kidneys may not be filtering properly. The amount of urine you produce is another sign of how well your kidneys are functioning. Blood tests show if waste products are building up in your blood.

Don't be afraid to ask for an explanation of the test results and how they compare to your previous tests. Learning and understanding is an important step to better health. Remember, it is all about **YOU** — write down your results so that you can compare how you are doing over time.

### Monitoring your health

- Doctor visits \_\_\_\_\_
- Blood tests \_\_\_\_\_
- Urine tests \_\_\_\_\_
- Diet \_\_\_\_\_
- Fluid intake \_\_\_\_\_
- Exercise \_\_\_\_\_
- Medications \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Notes

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## Tests: A Measure of YOUR Kidney Health

**Creatinine** is a waste product made by the breakdown of proteins and released into the blood. Measuring the creatinine in your blood (serum creatinine) is the simplest way to monitor kidney function. As your kidney function slows down, the creatinine level in your blood will rise. Your Nurse and Dietitian may suggest you adjust the amount of protein you eat each day.

- **Creatinine clearance** refers to the amount of creatinine in your urine. It is an accurate measure of how well the kidneys are cleaning the creatinine from your body.

**Urea** is a waste product in the blood that results from the normal breakdown of protein. Healthy kidneys filter the blood and remove urea, which is then released into the urine. When your kidneys are not filtering properly, urea builds up in your blood.

**Albumin**, or **serum albumin**, is a protein in your blood. Measuring serum albumin will tell if you are malnourished. This is a common problem in people with kidney disease, since you may lose your appetite and may not feel very hungry.



**Hemoglobin** measures your blood's ability to carry oxygen. Normal hemoglobin ranges from 110 to 160 mg/ml for most people who do not have kidney disease. **Your doctor will decide on what is the best range for you based on your kidney function.**

**Hematocrit** measures the percent of your blood that is made up of red blood cells. The normal range is between 33% and 35%. Your Doctor and Nurse monitor your hemoglobin and hematocrit, because when these levels are low, it is an important sign of anemia.





## Eating Right and Exercising will Keep Your Kidneys Healthy

### Creating a Diet that is Right for You

When your kidney function slows down, you must watch your diet carefully. That's because it's harder for your body to reach the right balance of carbohydrates, proteins, fats, and fluids necessary to keep you healthy.

You may need to pay special attention to the amount and type of certain elements in your diet, such as those containing potassium, phosphorous, sodium, and protein.

Remember, your doctor, nurse, or dietitian will work with you to create a diet plan that will fit with your lifestyle and that will keep your kidneys healthy for as long as possible.

## Glossary

### CALCIUM

A mineral found in bones, teeth, and body tissues. Calcium strengthens the bones.

### SODIUM

A salt found in most foods.

### PHOSPHORUS

A mineral found in all foods. It works with calcium to build strong bones, and with other chemicals as a source of energy. When kidney function begins to slow down, phosphorus remains in the body and can damage the bones.

### POTASSIUM

A mineral that is important for the muscles and nerves to work the right way. If your body does not get enough potassium your muscles will not work correctly and you will feel weak. Too much potassium can cause an irregular heartbeat and if your potassium becomes too high it can be dangerous to your health.

### PROTEIN

An essential nutrient that becomes a component of many parts of the body, including muscle, bone, skin, and blood.

Food component	Found in the following foods	My special considerations and preferences
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____



## Managing Your Fluid and Sodium Intake

If your kidneys are not removing enough fluid from your body, you may need to limit the amount of fluids (or liquids) you take in daily. Fluid build up may cause swelling, shortness of breath, and/or high blood pressure. Reducing the amount of sodium in your diet will help control your thirst and the amount of fluid your body retains. **Ask your doctor or dietitian if you should limit your fluid and sodium intake, and how to best go about doing this.**

### Tips to Control your Thirst:

- Avoid salt
- Suck on ice
- Chew sugarless gum
- Brush your teeth 3-4 times per day
- Rinse your mouth with mouth wash
- For Diabetics — Keep your blood glucose levels within normal range



## Regular Exercise can Make You Feel Even Better

A regular exercise routine will make you feel good physically and emotionally, and improve the quality of your life. Exercise can help reduce blood pressure, control diabetes, improve circulation, and build and strengthen your muscles and bones. Even walking daily can help you to begin feeling better.

**It's important to consult with your doctor or nurse about getting the right exercise.**



## Keeping Your Kidneys Healthy For As Long As Possible

Type of Medication	How it Works	Important Facts to Remember
<b>Blood Pressure / Antihypertensive Medication</b> <i>ACE inhibitors, B-Blockers, Calcium Channel Blockers, Angiotensin II receptor blockers</i>	To lower your blood pressure and help protect the tiny filters in your kidneys.	Never stop taking this medication without first discussing this with your doctor.
<b>Water Pills / Diuretics</b>	May cause you to urinate more to remove the extra salt and water from your body that causes your ankles, legs, and fingers to swell.	Reduce the amount of fluid and salt in your diet. Never stop taking this medication without first discussing this with your doctor.
<b>Erythropoetin / Hormone</b>	Taken to correct anemia and helps your body to produce red blood cells that carry oxygen through your body.	Your nurse can teach you how to take this injection medication by yourself if your doctor requires you to take it regularly.
<b>Iron</b>	Iron is used to produce red blood cells, which may be low if you have anemia.	Consult your pharmacist on how to take this medication with other foods and prescription medications.
<b>Phosphate Binders &amp; Calcium</b>	As kidney function slows down, the body can not store calcium or remove phosphorous properly from your blood.  Doctors prescribe calcium to bind extra phosphorous so that it can be eliminated through your intestines.	Always take calcium with your meals so that it binds with phosphorous and does not build up in your blood.
<b>Vitamins</b>	Vitamin B helps to produce red blood cells. Vitamin D makes it easier to absorb calcium.	Always check with your doctor before taking any vitamins.
<b>Herbs</b>	Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking any herbal supplement.	These can be very dangerous when your kidney function is slowing down.

**Reminder:** 1) Take your Prescription Medication as directed by your Doctor  
 2) Consult your Doctor or Pharmacist before taking Vitamins, Herbs, or other over-the-counter medication

## Kidney Resources

There are many resources available to help you learn about your kidney disease and how to best live with it.

### Here are just a few:

Kidney Foundation of Canada [www.kidney.ca](http://www.kidney.ca)

Canadian Diabetes Association [www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca)

Heart & Stroke Foundation of Canada [www.heartandstroke.ca](http://www.heartandstroke.ca)

AGIR (French kidney patient connection – Québec) [www.agir.qc.ca](http://www.agir.qc.ca)



**Thank you to those centres who helped put this material together.**

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