

# Kidney Disease: Am I at Risk?



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### **1 in 10 Canadians Has Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD).**

People are considered to have CKD when they have kidney damage or decreased kidney function, measured by blood tests, for three months or more.

Very often there are no symptoms when your kidneys start to lose function. You may not know you have kidney disease until you've lost most of your kidney function.

That's why it's so important to know the risk factors for kidney disease and to talk to your doctor about checking your kidney function.

Kidney disease doesn't go away, but most people don't progress to kidney failure. This is especially true if you're diagnosed early. Knowing you have kidney disease can help you take steps to preserve your remaining kidney function.

If your kidneys fail, treatments include dialysis or a kidney transplant, although some choose not to have these treatments. Damaged kidneys often don't heal, but treatments in the earlier stages of kidney disease can slow the progression of kidney disease. They can even prevent some complications.

*Model(s) are a depiction of people with kidney disease.*



The following questions will help you know whether you're at risk for kidney disease.

**Do you have diabetes or pre-diabetes (abnormal blood sugar)? Have you had diabetes during pregnancy?**

Yes  No

Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney failure in Canada. Uncontrolled blood sugar levels can damage the delicate filtering system of your kidneys.

If you have diabetes, have your kidney function and urine checked (for protein) at least once a year. Good control of your blood sugar levels can help protect your kidneys and may slow down the decline in your kidney function. There are treatments and medications that can slow down kidney damage caused by diabetes and deal with low kidney function. It's also important to adopt a healthy lifestyle. This means regular exercise, eating well, and taking medications as prescribed.

**Do you have high blood pressure?**

Yes  No

High blood pressure, also called hypertension, is the second leading cause of kidney failure in Canada.

Blood pressure is the force of blood pushing against the walls of your arteries as your heart beats. If this pressure rises and stays high over time, it can gradually damage the

tiny blood vessels in your kidneys. Kidney disease can also cause high blood pressure. Ask your healthcare provider about the right blood pressure target for you.

**Do you smoke?**

Yes  No

Smoking is harmful to your health. It increases your risk of heart attack, stroke, lung disease, kidney disease, and cancer. Smoking is especially harmful if you have CKD, because it can increase your risk of kidney failure.

Smoking damages your kidneys by hardening your arteries and narrowing your blood vessels. This can restrict blood flow to the kidneys and cause them to be less efficient.

If you smoke, try to quit. There are resources available to help you quit smoking.

Visit [www.smokershelpline.ca](http://www.smokershelpline.ca) or call 1-877-513-5333.

**Are you of Indigenous, African/Caribbean, Asian, South Asian, Hispanic, or Pacific Island descent?**

Yes  No

People from these backgrounds are at higher risk of developing kidney failure. They have more kidney disease risk factors and they experience a faster rate of kidney function decline at a younger age. Indigenous people (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) in Canada are over three times as likely to have their kidneys fail as non-Indigenous people.

There are many reasons for the higher rates of kidney failure in certain populations. Diabetes, genetics, and a change from a traditional lifestyle can be factors. Access to health care services, and other personal, social, or financial issues can also play a part in the higher rates.

If you're a member of one of these populations, talk to your doctor about having your kidney function checked.

**Do you have heart problems? Have you ever had a heart attack or stroke? Have you been diagnosed with cardiovascular disease?**

Yes  No

Heart disease and kidney disease are closely linked. Having heart disease puts you at greater risk of developing kidney disease, and vice versa. They also share many of the same risk factors, including diabetes and high blood pressure.

When your heart isn't pumping well, your kidneys don't get the blood flow they need to work effectively. Your body will try to compensate by increasing your blood volume. Ultimately, this leads to increased electrolytes in your blood, which places more strain on your kidneys.

If you have heart problems, talk to your doctor about steps you can take to protect both your heart and your kidneys.

**Do you have a family history of kidney failure?**

Yes  No

Some forms of kidney disease may be inherited. Diabetes and high blood pressure, the major causes of CKD, can also run in families.

Even if only one person in a family has kidney failure, all blood relatives should be tested for it.

**Do you take anti-inflammatory pain medication that contains ibuprofen or naproxen (e.g. Advil™, Aleve™, Motrin™, Celebrex™)?**

Yes  No

Ibuprofen and naproxen are part of a group of medications called Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs). NSAIDs have been linked to acute kidney injury in people without kidney disease. They're also associated with the progression of kidney disease in people with CKD. Heavy or long-term use of these medications can cause CKD.

Even with normal kidney function, you should use these medications exactly as prescribed by your doctor or as listed on the label. Try to use the lowest effective dose for the shortest period of time possible. If you have other risk factors for kidney disease, check with your doctor to be sure you can use these medications safely.

## Are you at an unhealthy weight?

Yes  No

Obesity leads to a greater risk of developing diabetes or high blood pressure, the leading causes of kidney failure. In people with obesity, the kidneys have to work harder by filtering more blood than normal. This extra work can damage the kidneys and raise the risk of developing CKD in the long-term.

If you aren't sure whether you're at a healthy weight, you can check your Body Mass Index (BMI) on the Dietitians of Canada website at [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca). The BMI is one of many tools that you and your healthcare provider can use to check your health. It measures risk based on your height and weight. It may be less accurate if you're under 18 or over 65 years of age, or if you are a muscular athlete, have amputations, or are pregnant or lactating.

If you are at an unhealthy weight, talk to your doctor about having your kidney function checked.

## Have you had any problems with your urinary system and/or prostate gland (e.g. multiple kidney stones, prostate cancer, kidney cancer, or recurrent urinary tract infections)?

Yes  No

Issues with the urinary system and/or prostate gland can sometimes contribute to kidney problems. If you have had any problems like these, talk to your doctor about checking your kidney function.

## Are you 65 years of age or older?

Yes  No

Kidney disease can develop at any age, but it becomes increasingly common as you get older. This may be because people over the age of 65 have more risk factors like diabetes and high blood pressure.

Whatever the reason, the higher rate of kidney disease in people 65 and up is important because kidney disease increases the risk of heart attack and stroke.

You can't change your age (though we might wish we could!), but there are steps you can take to preserve your kidney function as you age.

Since there are almost no warning signs when your kidneys begin to fail, it's important to know the risk factors. Take this pamphlet with you to your next doctor's appointment. Talk with your doctor about your risk factors and how often you should have your kidneys checked. All it takes are some simple blood and urine tests.

If it's caught early, kidney disease can be managed. Most people do not progress to end-stage kidney disease, especially if they're diagnosed early and they take steps to preserve their remaining kidney function.

A healthy lifestyle is very important in looking after your kidneys. This includes:

- Healthy eating
- Physical activity (30 minutes 3-5 times a week is recommended, but even small amounts of exercise have health benefits)
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Reducing stress
- Drinking alcohol in moderation (Canada's Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines recommends no more than 2 drinks a day, 10 per week for women, and no more than 3 drinks a day, 15 per week for men, and not drinking on some days each week)



## OUR VISION

The Kidney Foundation of Canada is committed to achieving excellent kidney health, optimal quality of life, and a cure for kidney disease.

## OUR MISSION

The Kidney Foundation of Canada is the national volunteer organization committed to eliminating the burden of kidney disease through:

- Funding and stimulating innovative research for better treatments and a cure;
- Providing education and support to prevent kidney disease in those at risk and empower those with kidney disease to optimize their health status;
- Advocating for improved access to high quality healthcare;
- Increasing public awareness and commitment to advancing kidney health and organ donation.

For further information, or to help us in our efforts, please contact The Kidney Foundation office in your area. You can also visit our website at [kidney.ca](http://kidney.ca).

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**This material is available in accessible formats upon request by contacting [info@kidney.ca](mailto:info@kidney.ca) or calling 1-800-361-7494.**