

# Itching and Chronic Kidney Disease

## *Chronic Kidney Disease-associated Pruritus (CKD-aP)*

**Pruritus** is the medical term for **itch** or **itchy skin**. It is a strong, uncomfortable, and ongoing feeling that makes you want to scratch your skin. **Chronic Kidney Disease-associated Pruritus (CKD-aP)** is itchy skin resulting from kidney disease. It is also called uremic pruritus or CKD-associated itch.

CKD-aP is more than just itching. It can affect the quality of life for many people with kidney disease. Often, itching interferes with sleep, concentration, and mood or mental health.

## Who is affected by CKD-aP?

Itching is **common** in people with advanced kidney disease, especially those on dialysis.

- About **40% of hemodialysis patients** in Canada experience moderate-to-severe itching.
- Improved dialysis has reduced the number of people who experience itching.

Itching is **less common and often milder** for people in the earlier stages of kidney disease.

- Up to **1 in 4 people** with kidney disease who are not on dialysis experience itching at some level.

The following may **increase your risk** of developing CKD-aP:

- Age
- Inflammation
- Dry skin
- Anemia
- Decreasing kidney function
- High amounts of minerals in the blood

## What causes CKD-aP?

The causes of itching in people with CKD is not well understood. However, the following factors can contribute to itching in CKD:

- Waste build up in the body
- Long term inflammation
- Dry skin
- Nerve damage
- High levels of parathyroid hormone
- High levels of phosphorus, magnesium, calcium, and aluminium



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Always follow the advice and recommendations of your healthcare team for your individual health needs.

## What does CKD-aP look like?

Itching may look different for everyone. The duration, location, and severity of itching **vary** between people.

- There may be visible skin damage from scratching, including redness, bumps, dryness, cracks, or blisters
- Itching may be **persistent or recurring**; for many people it affects them daily.
- It often affects the neck, face, and limbs, but can also affect the **entire body**.
- Itching may be **worse** in the evening or at night.

## How can I manage CKD-aP?

Here are some tips to help manage itch:

### Avoid harsh soaps and detergents:



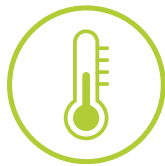
- Use gentle soaps and cleaning products.
- Wear gloves when using harsh cleaners.

### Wear comfortable clothing:



- Tight clothing or scratchy fabrics like wool may trigger or worsen itching.

### Be aware of temperature:



- Keep your home cool if possible. Itching may be made worse by hot temperatures.
- Avoid hot baths/showers as hot water can trigger or worsen itching. Use warm or cool water instead.

### Moisturize often:



- Use creams with gentle and hydrating ingredients, like ceramides or glycerin.
- Avoid creams with ingredients that trigger itching, like fragrances or exfoliants.
- Use humidifiers in dry spaces.

### Avoid breaking skin:



- Keep your nails short and clean or wear gloves to protect your skin (important if you scratch at night).
- Cool compresses can soothe skin without scratching.
- Cover open wounds to minimize your risk of infection and scarring.

### Follow a kidney-friendly diet:



- Good nutrition is important for kidney patients to keep vitamins and minerals in balance.
- Managing phosphate and calcium levels can help manage itch.
- Talk to a registered dietitian to help manage your diet.

### Talk to your healthcare team:



- Changing your dialysis treatments may help reduce the severity or duration of itch.
- Itching could be unrelated to kidney disease.
- Your healthcare team can also provide additional treatments or supports to help you manage itching.

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**Always follow the advice and recommendations of your healthcare team for your individual health needs.**