

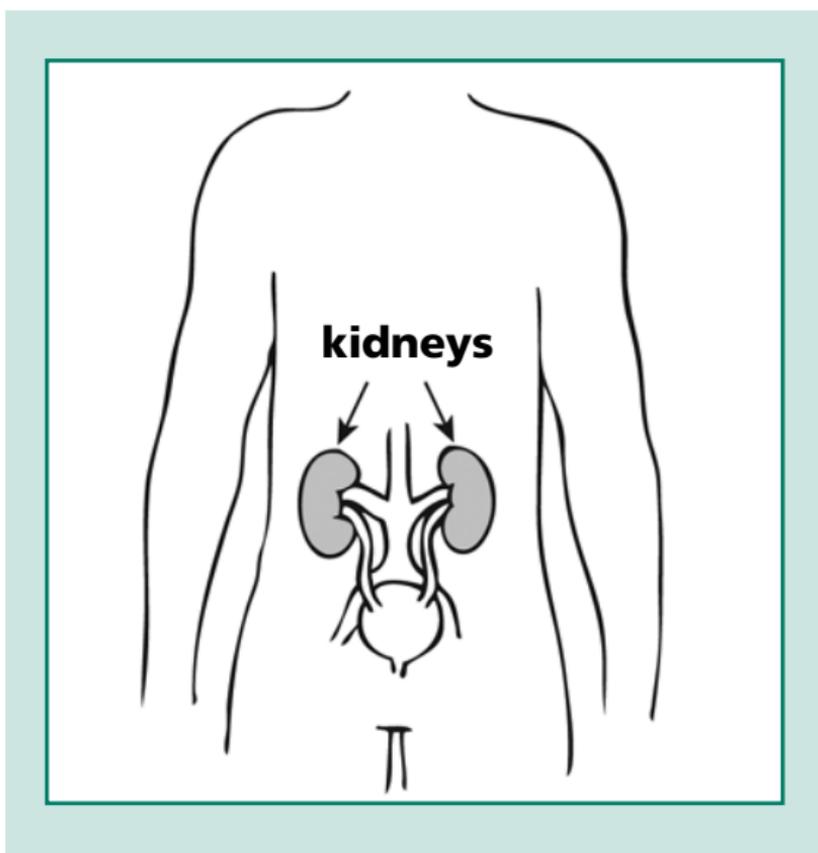
# AgePage

## Kidney Disease: A Silent Problem

*Henry has been having a hard time managing his health. He knows he's got high blood pressure and diabetes, but he just can't resist extra helpings of his wife's fry bread. During a checkup, Dr. Begay tested Henry's blood. The results showed Henry had developed chronic kidney disease. Henry wondered if the test results could be wrong because he didn't feel sick. Dr. Begay explained that people with kidney disease often do not know it. That's why it is called a "silent" disease.*

You have two kidneys, each the size of a fist. Your kidneys have an important job. They filter waste out of your blood and





remove extra water from your blood to make urine. Your kidneys also control your blood pressure and make hormones that your body needs to stay healthy.

## Kidney Disease

Kidney disease can sometimes develop very quickly, and when this happens, it is called acute kidney injury. Depending on the cause and severity of the problem, this form of kidney disease can sometimes get better.

The more common form of kidney disease happens slowly, over a long period of time. This is called chronic kidney

disease. You might hear it called CKD. Chronic kidney disease is a lifetime illness; it will not go away.

Chronic kidney disease is a widespread problem, especially in older people. In an early stage of the disease, the kidneys don't do a good job of removing extra water and waste out of the blood.

Over time, the problem gets worse, and the kidneys may completely stop working. This is called end-stage renal disease or ESRD. Renal is another word for kidney. When kidney disease gets very bad, it can cause other problems like heart disease, bone disease, arthritis, and nerve damage.

## **Medicine And Your Kidneys**

Older people often take lots of medicines. Kidneys help to filter out parts of the medicines that the body does not use. Kidney disease makes it hard for the kidneys to do this job. If you have kidney disease, your doctor may need to change the dose of some of your medicines. Sometimes this can make the kidney problem get better. Your doctor may also tell you not to take some over-the-counter medicines, like those for arthritis.

## Who Is At Risk?

Diabetes and high blood pressure are two major causes of kidney disease. People who have heart disease also have an increased risk for kidney disease.

Family history may also play a role in your risk for kidney disease. This means that if someone in your family, like your mother, father, sister, or brother, has kidney disease, you are more likely to have it too.

In addition, people of certain races and ethnicities, such as African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans, seem to have a greater chance of developing kidney disease.

Age is another factor. As you get older, your kidneys may not work as well as when you were younger. Ask your doctor to help you keep track of how well your kidneys are working.

## Tests For Kidney Disease

Kidney disease often does not have any symptoms. In fact, you might feel fine right up to the point when your kidneys nearly stop working. Only your doctor can tell if you have kidney disease.

There are two kinds of tests your doctor can do to see if you have kidney disease: a blood test and a urine test.

The blood test, called GFR, measures how much blood your kidneys filter each minute. Your doctor uses this information to see how well your kidneys are working. A GFR of over 60 means your kidneys are working fine. A GFR of 60 or lower may mean you have kidney disease. You cannot raise your GFR, but there are things you can do to keep it from getting lower (see the section *Prevent Your Kidneys From Getting Worse*).

The urine test shows if you have a kind of protein, called albumin, in your urine. Protein in your urine can be a sign of kidney damage. It is more common in people who have diabetes. Your doctor may need to do additional tests to confirm whether or not you have kidney disease.

Because most people who have kidney disease also have diabetes, high blood pressure, or both, your doctor might also check to see if you have these problems.

The earlier kidney disease is found, the sooner you can start a treatment to keep your kidneys healthier longer.

## Prevent Your Kidneys From Getting Worse

There is no cure for kidney disease. But, there are things you can do to help keep your kidneys from getting worse.

If your kidney disease is in an early stage, meaning your kidneys are still working, your doctor may prescribe blood pressure medicine and a diuretic (water pill) to lower your blood pressure and protect kidney function. You may also have to make some lifestyle changes, like eating a special low-salt diet and exercising regularly to keep a healthy weight.

### **At Your Next Doctor Visit, Find Out:**

- ◆ Your GFR
- ◆ The amount of albumin (protein) in your urine
- ◆ Your blood pressure
- ◆ Your blood glucose (high blood glucose can be a sign of diabetes)

You can keep track of your results using *Your Kidney Test Results*, a fact sheet available from the National Kidney Disease Education Program at [www.nkdep.nih.gov/resources](http://www.nkdep.nih.gov/resources).

## Treatment For End-Stage Renal Disease

If your kidneys have stopped working, meaning you are in end-stage renal disease, there are treatments that can replace your kidney function. Two main options are dialysis and a transplant.

Dialysis is a special process that removes waste and water from your blood.

Dialysis is done at a special center about three times a week or at home while you sleep. Your doctor will decide which is right for you.

A transplant is when you get a healthy kidney from a donor. Because people have two kidneys, a living person, usually a family member, can give you one of his or her kidneys.

Talk with your doctor about whether dialysis or a transplant might work for you.

## Medicare And Kidney Disease

Medicare may help pay for some kidney disease education and treatment. Contact Medicare to learn more about

what is covered. Look for the publications *Medicare Coverage of Kidney Dialysis and Kidney Transplant Services*, *Medicare and Kidney Disease Education*, and *Your Medicare Benefits* on the Medicare website, [www.medicare.gov/Publications](http://www.medicare.gov/Publications).

## For More Information

Here are some helpful resources:

### **American Association of Kidney Patients**

3505 East Frontage Road, Suite 315  
Tampa, FL 33607  
1-800-749-2257 (toll-free)  
[www.aakp.org](http://www.aakp.org)

### **American Kidney Fund**

6110 Executive Boulevard, Suite 1010  
Rockville, MD 20852  
1-866-300-2900 (toll-free)  
[www.kidneyfund.org](http://www.kidneyfund.org)

### **Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services**

7500 Security Boulevard  
Baltimore, MD 21244-1850  
1-800-633-4227 (1-800-MEDICARE,  
toll-free)  
1-877-486-2048 (TTY/toll-free)  
[www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)

**National Institute of Diabetes and  
Digestive and Kidney Diseases  
(NIDDK) Clearinghouse**

3 Information Way

Bethesda, MD 20892-3580

1-800-891-5390 (toll-free)

1-866-569-1162 (TTY/toll-free)

*www.kidney.niddk.nih.gov*

*For NIDDK's National Kidney Disease  
Education Program*

1-866-454-3639 (1-866-4-KIDNEY,  
toll-free)

*www.nkdep.nih.gov*

**National Kidney Foundation**

30 East 33rd Street

New York, NY 10016

1-800-622-9010 (toll-free)

1-212-889-2210

*www.kidney.org*

**National Library of Medicine  
MedlinePlus**

*www.medlineplus.gov*



For more information on health and aging, contact:

**National Institute on Aging  
Information Center**

P.O. Box 8057

Gaithersburg, MD 20898-8057

1-800-222-2225 (toll-free)

1-800-222-4225 (TTY/toll-free)

*www.nia.nih.gov*

*www.nia.nih.gov/Espanol*

To sign up for regular email alerts about new publications and other information from the NIA, go to *www.nia.nih.gov/health*.

Visit *www.nihseniorhealth.gov*, a senior-friendly website from the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine. This website has health and wellness information for older adults. Special features make it simple to use. For example, you can click on a button to have the text read out loud or to make the type larger.



National Institute on Aging

National Institutes of Health  
U.S. Department of Health &  
Human Services

April 2011

