



FROM THE OFFICE OF DR.

Slowing the damage of kidney disease

Your doctor has told you that you have kidney disease, which means your kidneys are not working as well as they should. The kidneys are two fist-sized organs located in the back of the body just under the ribcage. They contain about a million nephrons—filters that clean the blood by filtering out extra water and wastes. They also make hormones that keep your bones strong and your blood healthy.

In kidney disease, some of the nephrons become damaged. Over time, the kidneys become less able to filter off the waste products, which begin to accumulate in the blood. At this point, a person may experience symptoms such as lack of energy, insomnia, poor appetite, nausea, vomiting, difficulty breathing, high blood pressure, and very little urine production. Eventually dialysis or transplantation is necessary.

Although there are a variety of causes of renal disease, high blood pressure and diabetes are the two main culprits in the United States.

Can I do anything to stop the disease?

Two strategies have been proven to slow or halt the progression of kidney disease:

- **Reduce your blood pressure.** The goal is to get your blood pressure under 130/80. You may be able to do this by eating less salt, losing weight, and avoiding alcohol. If not, your physician will ask you to take a medication to lower blood pressure, such as an angiotensin-converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitor.
- **Control your blood sugar** if you have diabetes. One test that helps doctors determine how well diabetes is under control is called the hemoglobin A1c (HbA1c).

This test reflects the average blood sugar over the most recent three months. Ideally, this should be less than 7%.

Other measures that may help

Although the following two strategies have been shown to slow kidney disease in animals, they may not do so in humans. However, some physicians believe that they are worth trying:

- **Eat less protein.** Protein seems to make the kidneys work harder. Reducing dietary protein reduces their workload. A registered dietitian will design a daily diet that contains 0.6 to 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight. Because following a low-protein diet is difficult, consider taking this step only if you are willing to make dietary changes.
- **Lower your cholesterol level.** To do this, your physician may ask you to take a drug such as atorvastatin (Lipitor), pravastatin (Pravachol), simvastatin (Zocor), or others.

For more information:

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www.kidney.org

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases
31 Center Drive, MSC 2560
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