

Looking after your kidneys

Looking after your kidneys is important when you have diabetes. Having healthy kidneys can help keep your body in good condition and improve your general wellbeing.

Your kidneys filter your blood to get rid of waste and toxins from your body. They also regulate your blood pressure.

Kidney disease (nephropathy) is common in people with diabetes. Over time, high blood pressure and high blood glucose levels can damage the small blood vessels in the kidney (known as microvascular disease). As a result, these small blood vessels become leaky and don't filter the blood properly, so the kidneys don't work as well as they should.



If you have kidney disease, you may also be more likely to have other diabetes-related complications, such as heart disease and damage to the nerves and eyes. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have an increased risk of diabetes-related kidney disease.

Symptoms of kidney disease

In the early stages of kidney disease, there may not be any symptoms. That's why it's important to have your kidney function checked regularly as part of your annual diabetes health check.

As kidney disease worsens, there may be changes in how often you pass urine and/or how much you pass. Other symptoms may include tiredness, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, headaches, loss of concentration, shortness of breath, swollen ankles, nausea and vomiting.

How can your doctor help?

It's important that kidney problems are picked up as soon as possible. Early detection is the best way to prevent more damage occurring. Your doctor should order a urine test and a blood test every 12 months to check how your kidneys are working.

Your urine sample will be checked by a pathology lab for a protein called albumin. If small amounts of albumin are detected, this is known as microalbuminuria and is an early indication that the blood vessels in the kidney are damaged and leaking protein.

Helpline 1300 136 588

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There is a blood test that measures the rate at which your kidneys filter blood and that checks how well they are working. You should have this test done every year.

How is kidney disease treated?

Keeping your blood pressure and blood glucose within the recommended range reduces the rate of damage to the kidneys. Your doctor may prescribe medication to lower your blood pressure even if your readings are in the target range. These types of medications not only reduce blood pressure but also help to look after your kidneys.

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There are lots of things you can do to keep your kidneys healthy:

- » Keep your blood glucose levels within the target range. Over time, high blood glucose levels damage the small vessels in the kidneys.
- » Keep blood pressure as close to the target range as possible. Aim for a target of 130/80 or less. If you have existing cardiovascular or kidney disease your doctor will advise you on a blood pressure target to meet your individual health needs.
- » Do regular physical activity, as this is a great way to reduce your blood pressure. Aim for 30 minutes most days of the week. Check with your doctor before starting a physical activity program.
- » Reduce your salt intake by choosing foods that are low in salt (sodium), using salt-reduced products, and limiting how much salt you add to foods.
- » Don't smoke. If you do smoke, try and quit. Smoking increases your blood pressure and causes damage to the small vessels of the kidneys, which may increase the risk of kidney problems. If you feel you can't give up smoking on your own, ask for help – talk to your doctor or call the Quitline on 137 848.
- » If you think you have a bladder or kidney infection, contact your doctor immediately. Symptoms can include cloudy or bloody urine, passing urine more often (or feeling the need to pass urine more often) and/or a 'burning' feeling when passing urine.
- » Choose water as the best everyday drink. If you have existing kidney disease, you may be given specific advice on how much water to drink every day.
- » Speak to your doctor or diabetes health professionals about what you can do to help keep your kidneys healthy.
- » If the health of your kidneys is causing you to feel worried or anxious, speak to a psychologist or social worker.



More information

For more information about kidney health, go to www.kidney.org.au

The NDSS and you

The NDSS provides a range of services to help you manage your diabetes. These include our Infoline and website for advice on diabetes management, NDSS products and a range of support programs to help you learn more about managing your diabetes.

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