

Chronic Kidney Disease: Symptoms, Causes, Diagnosis, Treatment and Prevention

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Chronic kidney disease (CKD) happens when the kidneys are damaged or cannot filter blood as well as they should over time. In its early stages, CKD usually does not cause symptoms, which is why testing matters, especially for people with other risk factors. It often goes hand in hand with other long-term health conditions, especially diabetes, obesity, heart disease / cardiovascular disease, and stroke.

Managing those conditions well can help reduce kidney damage and slow CKD progression.

What is chronic kidney disease?

Chronic kidney disease is a long-lasting condition where the kidneys slowly lose their ability to filter waste and excess fluid from the blood.

It is typically diagnosed through blood and urine tests and is often classified into stages based on kidney function and signs of damage.

Symptoms of chronic kidney disease

In its early stages, CKD might not cause obvious symptoms. When symptoms do appear, they can include feeling tired, swelling in the ankles, feet, or hands, shortness of breath, changes in how often a person urinates, itchy skin, loss of appetite, nausea, muscle cramps, and trouble sleeping.

Because these symptoms can be vague, CKD is sometimes overlooked or mistaken for other long-term health issues. Fatigue, low mood, poor focus, and changes in appetite can overlap with other conditions, which is one reason routine testing is so important for people at risk.

What causes chronic kidney disease?

In adults, diabetes and high blood pressure are the leading causes of CKD. Other possible causes include heart disease, inherited disorders, kidney inflammation, recurring kidney infections, or urinary tract issues that gradually impair kidney function.

Main risk factors

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease / cardiovascular disease
- Family history of kidney disease
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Older age

How chronic kidney disease is diagnosed

Doctors often check for CKD with a blood test to estimate how well the kidneys are filtering and a urine test to detect albumin, a protein that can leak into urine when the kidneys are damaged.

Blood pressure is also monitored, and tests are repeated because CKD is usually tracked over time rather than diagnosed from a single symptom.

Treatment options for chronic kidney disease

While there is no cure for CKD, treatment can help manage symptoms, prevent complications, and slow the progression of the disease. The approach depends on the stage of CKD and its underlying cause.

Lifestyle treatment

- Stopping smoking
- Keeping physically active
- Reaching or maintaining a healthier weight
- Reducing salt intake
- Eating a balanced diet
- Managing blood sugar carefully in people with diabetes

Medicines and medical care

Treatment can involve medications to manage blood pressure, control diabetes, reduce swelling, protect kidney function, and lower the risk of issues such as heart disease. In later stages of CKD, care may also include monitoring anaemia, bone health, and fluid balance.

Dialysis and transplant

If CKD gets worse and the kidneys can no longer do enough of their work on their own, treatment might include dialysis or a kidney transplant. These options are usually considered for advanced kidney failure rather than early stages of CKD.

Can chronic kidney disease be prevented?

Not all CKD can be prevented, but risk can often be reduced by controlling high blood pressure and diabetes, staying active, keeping to a healthier weight, avoiding smoking, and getting tested if you are at higher risk.

Early detection matters because CKD often has no symptoms at first, and conditions such as diabetes, obesity, heart disease / cardiovascular disease, and stroke are strongly connected to it in both prevention and long-term management.

Living with chronic kidney disease

Living with CKD often involves regular blood and urine tests, medication reviews, blood pressure checks, and conversations about diet and fluid balance. Some people remain stable for years, while others need more specialised care as kidney function changes.

CKD can also affect emotional wellbeing, especially when it appears alongside other long-term conditions. Support with lifestyle adjustments, medication routines, and mental wellbeing can make a meaningful difference.

Questions to ask your doctor

- What stage of CKD do I have?
- What caused my kidney disease?
- How often do I need blood and urine tests?
- What should my blood pressure target be?
- Do I need to change my diet or salt intake?
- Which medicines help protect my kidneys?
- What symptoms should I treat as urgent?

Final thought

Chronic kidney disease often develops silently, but early testing and keeping blood pressure, diabetes, and heart health in check can make a big difference. For many people, the key is consistency: regular check-ups, taking medications as prescribed, and tackling related conditions early on.

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