

# Chronic kidney disease (The Basics)

**What is chronic kidney disease?** — Chronic kidney disease is when the kidneys stop working as well as they should. When they are working normally, the kidneys filter the blood and remove waste and excess salt and water. When you have chronic kidney disease, they aren't able to do these things as well. Over time, the kidneys can stop working completely. That is why it is so important to keep chronic kidney disease from getting worse.

**What are the symptoms of chronic kidney disease?** — At first, chronic kidney disease causes no symptoms. As the disease gets worse, it can:

- Make your feet, ankles, or legs swell (doctors call this "edema")
- Give you high blood pressure
- Make you very tired
- Damage your bones

Is there anything I can do to keep my kidneys from getting worse if I have chronic kidney disease?

— Yes, you can protect your kidneys by:

- Taking blood pressure and other medicines every day, if your doctor or nurse prescribes them to you.
- Keeping your blood sugar in a healthy range, if you have diabetes.
- Changing your diet, if your doctor or nurse says you should.
- **Avoiding** medicines known as "nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs," or NSAIDs. These medicines include ibuprofen (sample brand names: Advil, Motrin) and naproxen (sample brand name: Aleve). Check with your doctor, nurse, or kidney specialist before starting any new medicines—even over-the-counter ones or herbal supplements.

**What are the treatments for chronic kidney disease?** — People in the early stages of chronic kidney disease can take medicines to keep the disease from getting worse. For example, many people with chronic kidney disease should take medicines known as "ACE inhibitors" or "angiotensin receptor blockers." If your doctor or nurse prescribes these medicines, it is very important that you take them every day as directed. If they cause side effects or cost too much, speak to your doctor or nurse about it. He or she might have solutions to offer.

What happens if my kidneys stop working completely? — If your kidneys stop working completely, you can choose between 3 different treatments to take over the job of your kidneys.

**Your choices are described below:**

- **Kidney Transplant:** A new kidney can be surgically implanted. That way, the new kidney can do the job of your own kidneys. If you have a kidney transplant, you will need to take medicines for the rest of your life to keep your body from reacting badly to the new kidney. (You only need 1 kidney to live.)
- **Hemodialysis:** You can have your blood filtered by a machine. This treatment is called "hemodialysis," but many people call it just "dialysis." If you choose this approach, you will need to be hooked up to the machine at least 3 times a week for a few hours. Before you start, you will also need to have surgery to prepare a blood vessel for attachment to the machine.

- **Peritoneal Dialysis:** With this method of dialysis, a special “cleaning fluid” fills and drains the belly several times per day, washing away waste products and extra fluid. If you choose this type of dialysis, you will need surgery to have a tube implanted in your belly. This is completed by patients at home usually while sleeping at night.

**How do I choose between the different treatment options?** — You and your doctor will need to work together to find a treatment that's right for you. Kidney transplant surgery is usually the best option for most people. But often there are no kidneys available for transplant. Peritoneal dialysis is mostly completed by patients at home and since usually completed at night while sleeping may make it easier for adults to continue working and children to go to school. Ask your doctor to explain all of your options and how they might work for you. Then talk openly with him or her about how you feel about all of the options. You might even decide that you do not want any treatment. That is your choice.