

MAY

WOMEN AND CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE



Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) affects an estimated 30 million Americans. This is 1 out of every 7 adults.

Did you know that more women are being diagnosed with chronic kidney disease? The diagnosis of chronic kidney disease (CKD) in women is on the rise. It is the eighth leading cause of death in women. Research has shown that the risk for CKD is slightly greater in women than in men.¹

Are you at risk for chronic kidney disease? Diabetes, high blood pressure, heart problems increase your risk for chronic kidney disease. Ask your doctor if you need to be tested. Most women will not have symptoms in the early stages of kidney disease. The only way to know if you have kidney disease is to get a blood and urine test. As kidney disease gets worse you may have some noticeable problems. Let your doctor or healthcare provider know if you have any of these problems.

Symptoms of worsening kidney function include:

- Poor appetite
- Low energy
- Trouble sleeping
- Dry and itchy skin
- Swollen feet or ankles
- Frequent urination, especially at night
- Not thinking clearly

Are some women more likely to get chronic kidney disease than others? Some people are more likely to get CKD than others. Kidney disease is more common in African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and American Indians. Also, women who are over 60 years old or women with a family history of kidney failure are at increased risk. Some autoimmune diseases, like lupus, can cause kidney problems. Lupus affects more women than men (9 women to 1 man) and more than half of people with lupus have kidney problems.



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What steps can women take to keep their kidneys healthy? Keep your kidneys strong by leading a healthy life. This means eating a well-balanced diet, exercising regularly, and maintaining a healthy weight. A healthy life also includes managing your stress, not smoking (or quitting if you do smoke), limiting your alcohol, and getting plenty of sleep.

What role does nutrition play in kidney disease management? For women with kidney disease, it is important to work with your doctor and/or a dietitian to create a healthy eating plan. For example, too much sodium (salt) in your diet can cause fluid to build up in your body and/or increase blood pressure, which strains your heart. Everyone is different and so is your dietary plan. Ask your doctor if vitamins or supplements are safe for your kidneys before you start taking them. Remember: If you have questions, ask your doctor if a dietitian consult is right for you.

Are UTIs and kidney infections more common in women? Women are more likely than men to get a urinary tract infection (UTI), such as a bladder or kidney infection, because of a woman's anatomy. The urethra (the tube that leads from the bladder to the outside of the body) is shorter in women. This makes it easier for bacteria to travel into the bladder and cause an infection. If you are prone to UTIs ask your doctor about ways to prevent this type of infection.

What about pregnancy and kidney disease? It is more difficult for women with kidney disease to get pregnant. Pregnancy may also add stress to your kidneys if the kidneys are already damaged.

Are you thinking about becoming pregnant? If so, you should discuss the risks that pregnancy brings to you and the unborn baby with your healthcare provider. Your doctor knows your medical history and can help you evaluate your risks.

How can you take control of your health when you're a woman with kidney disease? Be an active member of your own healthcare team. Work with your healthcare provider so they know your concerns, ask questions and participate in all decisions. Keep records about your medical history, and current medications. Learn about your condition and let your doctor know if you have questions.

REFERENCES:

¹ United States Renal Data System. 2016 USRDS annual data report: Epidemiology of kidney disease in the United States. National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, Bethesda, MD, 2016.