

How to keep your kidneys healthy, and how to spot when things are going wrong

April 10 2024, by Nicola Thomas



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Healthy kidneys are vital to your well-being. As well as getting rid of waste from your body in your pee, they also have a role in controlling blood pressure, keeping your blood count high and keeping your bones

healthy. To keep your kidneys healthy there are several things you can do to help yourself.

Don't let your kidneys dry out; make sure you drink a decent amount of fluid every day. Drinking water is the best way to keep your kidneys hydrated, but any fluid such as tea or fruit-flavored drinks are fine. You should try and aim for at least eight cups or glasses of fluid every day.

Next, think about what you eat. Adding salt to your food increases your blood pressure, and if you have high blood pressure over a long period, this can lead to kidney problems. Aim for less than one teaspoon of salt each day.

It is easy to see how much salt you eat when you add it directly to your meal or when you add it to cooking, but a lot of salt is hidden in foods. Very salty foods include burgers, sausages, bacon, cheese, smoked fish and crisps. Ready meals, packet sauces and sauces can also be very salty, as well as stock and seasoning cubes.

Smoking is bad for your kidneys, as it closes up the blood vessels in the kidneys and also increases blood pressure.

On the other hand, exercise is good for the kidneys. Taking exercise does not necessarily need to be at a gym, but rather make sure that your heart pumps hard every day by walking quickly or climbing up stairs. You can also help your kidneys by keeping to a healthy weight.

A simple measure is to aim to keep your waist measurement to less than half your height. This is important as it will tell you how much fat you have around your middle in relation to elsewhere in your body. Just use a piece of string. Measure your height with the string and then cut it in half. If the string then does not reach around your waist, you are carrying too much fat.

How can you spot when things go wrong?

It is not always easy to notice problems with your kidneys, as often any signs do not appear until your kidneys have been damaged quite a bit.

Kidney damage comes in five stages, with stage five being the worst. It is not until stage four that people might notice they are feeling more tired than usual.

People might notice headaches or blurred vision, but this is often due to high blood pressure. In the later stages of [kidney damage](#), people might have nausea or lose their appetite.

As it is not easy to spot yourself when your kidneys might have a problem, it is important to be aware of whether you need a regular kidney check. Kidney checks involve a [simple blood test](#) and urine test. Your doctor or nurse will then be able to tell you whether you need any regular check-ups or any medication.

People who have diabetes, [high blood pressure](#), [heart problems](#) or kidney disease in their family should ask their [family doctor](#) or nurse for a test.

Sadly, certain groups of people are more at risk of getting [kidney disease](#). A [report](#) by the UK Kidney Association in 2023 found that people of black and minority ethnic heritage have higher rates of kidney failure and are affected at younger ages. It is even more important for you to be aware of how to look after your kidneys if you are in one of these groups.

There are lots of interesting projects going on to try and reach people who do not regularly see a doctor or nurse for blood pressure or kidney checks. One project has involved [barbers offering](#) blood pressure checks and advice, while [my colleagues and I](#) have investigated the feasibility of

doing kidney tests at home with the aid of a smartphone.

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