

# DIABETES AND CHRONIC KIDNEY DISEASE

## Stage 5



National  
Kidney  
Foundation™

[www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org)

## National Kidney Foundation's Kidney Disease Outcomes Quality Initiative

Did you know that the National Kidney Foundation's Kidney Disease Outcomes Quality Initiative (NKF-KDOQI™) offers guidelines and commentaries that help your doctor and healthcare team make important decisions about your medical treatment? The information in this booklet is based on those recommended guidelines

### Stages of Kidney Disease

There are 5 stages of kidney disease. They are shown in the table below. Your doctor determines your stage of kidney disease based on the presence of kidney damage and your glomerular filtration rate (GFR), which is a measure of your level of kidney function. Your treatment is based on your stage of kidney disease. Speak to your doctor if you have any questions about your stage of kidney disease or your treatment.

#### STAGES OF KIDNEY DISEASE

Stage	Description	Glomerular Filtration Rate (GFR)*
1	Kidney damage (e.g., protein in the urine) with normal GFR	90 or above
2	Kidney damage with mild decrease in GFR	60 to 89
3	Moderate decrease in GFR	30 to 59
4	Severe reduction in GFR	15 to 29
5	Kidney failure	Less than 15

\*Your GFR number tells your doctor how much kidney function you have. As chronic kidney disease progresses, your GFR number decreases.

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## What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a serious disease. It occurs when your body does not make enough insulin or cannot use the insulin it makes. Insulin is a hormone. It controls the amount of sugar (called *glucose*) in your blood. A high blood sugar level can cause problems in many parts of your body.

## Are there different types of diabetes?

Yes. There are two main types:

- *Type 1 diabetes*

If you have this type of diabetes, your body does not make insulin. It usually starts when you are a child or young adult, but it can occur at any age. It is treated by taking daily insulin shots or using an insulin pump and by following a special meal plan. About 5 to 10 percent of cases of diabetes are type 1.

- *Type 2 diabetes*

If you have this type of diabetes, your body makes some insulin but cannot use it properly. Type 2 is partially preventable and is typically brought on by poor diet and lack of exercise. Very often heredity plays a part. It usually starts when you are over age 40, but it can happen earlier.

It is treated with exercise, weight loss, and special meal planning. People with type 2 diabetes may need insulin, but in most cases medications given in pills (called *hypoglycemics*) are prescribed if diet and exercise alone do not control the disease. Type 2 is the most common type of diabetes.

## How does diabetes affect my body?

When diabetes is not well controlled, the sugar level in your blood goes up. This is called *hyperglycemia*. High blood sugar can cause damage to many parts of your body, especially:

- kidneys
- heart
- blood vessels
- eyes
- feet
- nerves

Diabetes can also cause high blood pressure and hardening of the arteries (called *arteriosclerosis*). These can lead to heart and blood vessel disease.

## How does diabetes harm the kidneys?

Diabetes can harm the kidneys by causing damage to:

- *Blood vessels in the kidneys*

The filtering units of the kidney are filled with tiny blood vessels. Over time, high sugar levels in the blood can cause these vessels to become narrow and clogged. Without enough blood, the kidneys become damaged and albumin (which is a type of protein) passes through these filters and ends up in the urine where it should not be.

- *Nerves in your body*

Diabetes can also cause damage to the nerves in your body. Nerves carry messages between your brain and all other parts of your body, including your bladder. They let your brain know when your bladder is full. But if the nerves of the bladder are damaged, you may not be able to feel when your bladder is full. The pressure from a full bladder can damage your kidneys.

- *Urinary tract*

If urine stays in your bladder for a long time, you may get a urinary tract infection. This is because of bacteria. Bacteria are tiny

organisms like germs that can cause disease. They grow very fast in urine with a high sugar level. Most often these infections affect the bladder, but they can sometimes spread to the kidneys.

Not all kidney damage is caused by diabetes. Other diseases can be involved. If the cause of your kidney damage is not known, you may be asked to have a kidney biopsy. A kidney biopsy can help your doctor find the cause.

### **What is kidney failure?**

Kidney failure means your kidneys have stopped working well enough to keep you alive. When your kidneys fail:

- Harmful wastes build up in your body
- Your blood pressure may rise
- Your body may hold too much fluid
- Your body cannot make enough red blood cells

When this happens, you need treatment to replace the work of your failed kidneys. There is no cure for kidney failure. A person with kidney failure needs treatment to live.

## **How is kidney failure treated?**

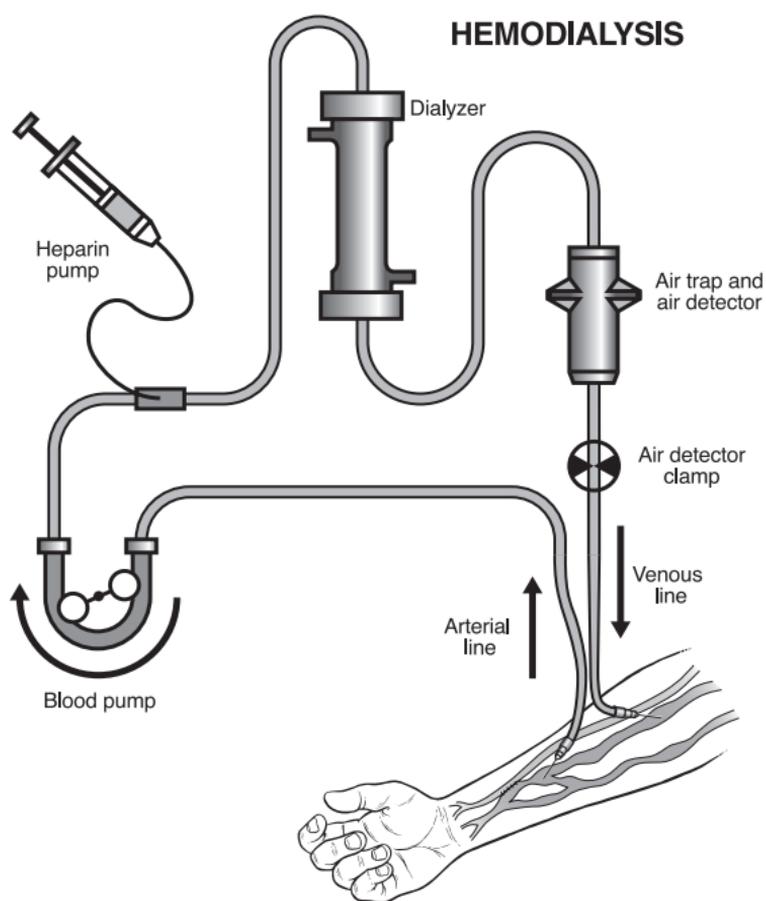
Three types of treatment can be used if your kidneys have failed:

1. Hemodialysis
2. Peritoneal dialysis
3. Kidney transplantation

Your healthcare team will discuss these different treatments with you and answer all your questions. They will help you choose the best treatment for you, based on your general health, lifestyle, and treatment preference. Your decision does not need to be final. Many people have used each one of these treatments at different times in their lifetime.

## **What does hemodialysis involve?**

In hemodialysis, your blood flows through a machine that has a filter which cleans the blood. This machine is called an artificial kidney or dialyzer. Hemodialysis is usually done three times a week, several hours each session. It can be done at a dialysis center or at home. To get your blood into the artificial kidney, two needles are inserted into your vein during dialysis treatment. Hemodialysis is the most common form of treatment for kidney failure.

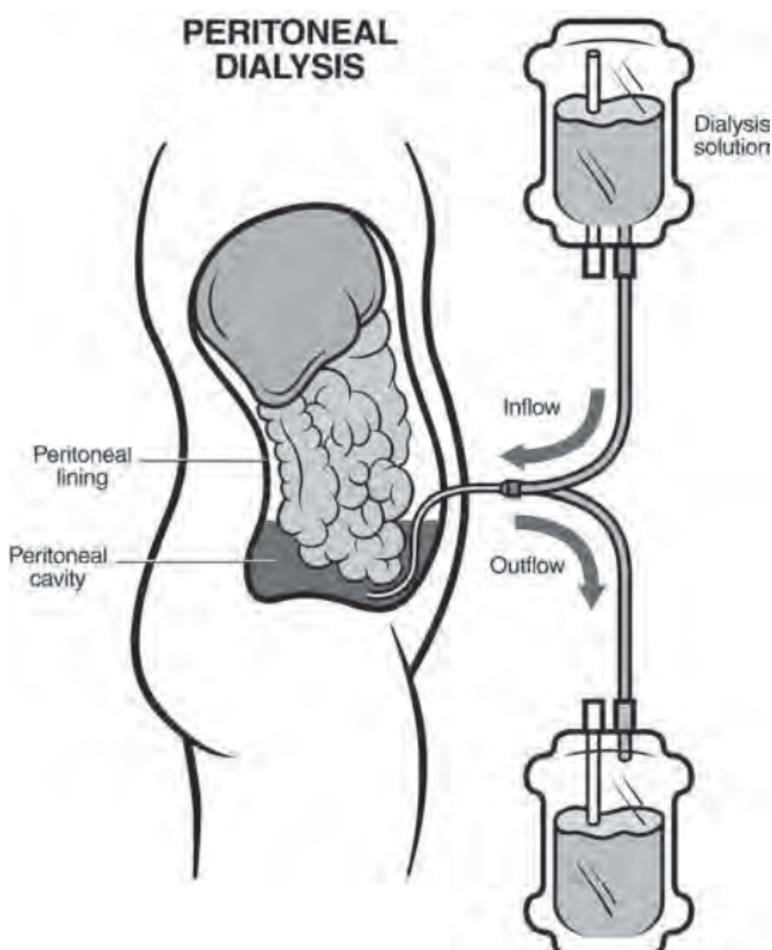


## What does peritoneal dialysis involve?

In this type of dialysis, your blood is not cleaned outside the body, as with hemodialysis. Instead, the blood stays in the blood vessels that line your own belly. Here's how it works:

A soft tube, called a *catheter*, is placed in your belly. This is done by minor surgery. This catheter makes it possible for you to easily connect special tubing which allows two to three quarts of a cleansing fluid to flow into your belly. The cleansing fluid is called *dialysate*.

What happens next is an amazing process. The lining of your belly (called the *peritoneal membrane*) acts as a natural filter. It lets the wastes and extra fluid in your blood pass through it into the cleansing fluid. At the same time, the lining of your belly holds back the important things your body needs, like red blood cells and nutrients. Once the process is finished, you drain the used cleansing fluid into an empty bag. You discard the bag. This process is then repeated usually four to six times during the day or night. Peritoneal dialysis can be done at home, at work, or while traveling.



## Can a patient with diabetes have a kidney transplant?

Yes. A kidney can come from someone who has died or from a living person who wishes to donate a kidney. The living donor might be a close relative, friend, or even a stranger who wants to donate a kidney to someone in need. Once you get a new kidney, you may need a higher dose of insulin or hypoglycemic pills (to lower blood sugar level). This is because:

- You will be eating more
- Your new kidney will break down insulin better than your injured one
- You will be using medicines to keep your body from rejecting your new kidney and these may react less well to the insulin

If your transplanted kidney loses function, dialysis treatment can be started and you can wait for another transplant.

## When You Have Kidney Failure

The kidney doctor (called a *nephrologist*) will plan your treatment with you, your family, and your dietitian. In addition to dialysis or a transplant, you will need to:

- Keep your blood sugar levels on target
- Control high blood pressure
- Manage cholesterol and blood lipids
- Treat anemia (low red blood cell count), if needed
- Treat mineral and bone disorder, if needed
- Get tested regularly for heart and blood vessel disease
- Manage your diet carefully
- Follow your diabetes treatment plan of medications, diet, and exercise

### What about kidney-pancreas transplants?

If you have type 1 diabetes, it may also be possible to have a pancreas transplant. This might be done at the

same time as your kidney transplant or soon afterwards. The pancreas is an organ in your body that helps produce insulin. A pancreas transplant gives you the chance to stop taking insulin shots. Your doctor can advise you about this procedure.

## **What does diabetes treatment involve?**

- *Managing blood sugar*

Besides your kidneys, diabetes can cause serious damage to your heart, blood vessels, eyes, feet, and nerves. The best way to protect them is by controlling blood sugar. This is usually done with diet, exercise, and, if needed, insulin shots or hypoglycemic pills. The dose of insulin often has to change when people go on dialysis or get a new kidney transplant.

You will also need to:

- *Test for A1C regularly.*

Your A1C test tells you what your average blood sugar has been for the past 2–3 months. It also helps your doctor know whether your diabetes is under control. You should be tested twice a year if your diabetes is under control. Otherwise you should be tested every three

months. For most people with diabetes, the result should be around 7 percent. Depending on your overall health, a slightly higher level might be okay in some circumstances. Ask your doctor what your test result should be. Stay on goal. It will help protect your heart, blood vessels, eyes, feet, and nerves.

- *Use a blood glucose meter.* You must also check your blood sugar levels every day. You can do this test at home with a blood glucose meter. The test is usually done several times a day. It tells you what your blood sugar is at any moment.
- *Safeguard against low blood sugar.* Most people know that high blood sugar is dangerous. But low blood sugar (called *hypoglycemia*) can be dangerous as well. Your risk of low blood sugar is higher if you are on dialysis, especially if you have trouble eating, are often sick to your stomach, or have other digestive problems. Tell your doctor if you have any of these symptoms.

- *Controlling high blood pressure*  
Your blood pressure will be a little higher before your dialysis treatment than it is after treatment. This happens because dialysis replaces the work of your failed kidneys. It cleans your blood of harmful wastes and helps lower blood pressure.

Blood pressure goals are not the same for everyone. Yours will depend on your age and other factors. The goal for many people on dialysis is to keep blood pressure around:

Before dialysis: Less than 140/90

After dialysis: Less than 130/80

You must check your blood pressure as often as your doctor recommends. You may also need medicine to control your blood pressure. For some people, more than one high blood pressure medicine may be needed. Studies show that the use of these medicines may help reduce heart disease in people with diabetes. Your doctor may also have you:

- Drink less fluid
- Eat less salt

- Have longer dialysis treatments
- Have more than three dialysis treatments per week
- Take drugs that lower your craving for salt
- Take blood-pressure medicine at night rather than during the day

- *Managing cholesterol and blood lipids*

Many people with diabetes and kidney failure have high levels of lipids in the blood. Lipids are fatty substances like cholesterol. High blood lipid levels can cause the blood vessels to become clogged. This lessens the blood supply to the heart and brain, and raises your chance of having a heart attack or stroke. Your doctor will check your cholesterol and lipids at least once a year. If they are too high, you may need drugs to help lower them.

- *Treating anemia*

People on dialysis often get anemia (low red blood cell count). Why does this happen? Healthy kidneys help your body make red blood cells. But if you have kidney failure, your kidneys are unable to do this very well. To treat anemia, you will need to take a special medicine

called an ESA (*erythropoiesis-stimulating agent*) and iron supplements to help make red blood cells.

- *Treating mineral and bone disorder*

Many people with kidney failure have mineral and bone disorder. Mineral and bone disorder causes your arteries to stiffen and become narrow from the extra calcium and phosphorus in your blood. This reduces blood flow to your heart and can lead to heart attack and death. You may need special medicines called phosphate binders to help treat mineral and bone disorders. You may also need to eat fewer foods that contain phosphorus, such as dairy, nuts, seeds, dried beans, and peas. Your dietitian can help you plan meals that are right for you.

- *Getting tested for heart and blood vessel disease*

Heart and blood vessel problems are common in people with both diabetes and kidney failure. In fact, half of all dialysis patients will die of heart disease. You should be tested when you first start on dialysis, and at least once every year afterwards.

- *Managing your diet*

There are special dietary needs for people with diabetes who are also on dialysis. For example, you may need more protein than what is normally recommended for people with diabetes. You should talk to your doctor about this. Do not change your diabetes diet without first talking to a dietitian who specializes in kidney disease so that you have a healthy approach to dietary changes.

- *Following your diabetes treatment plan of medications, diet, and exercise*

You must continue to follow your diabetes treatment plan of medications, diet and exercise. This will help protect the rest of your body, including your heart, blood vessels, eyes, nerves, and feet. Ask your doctor about which diabetes medications are best for you. Some medicines may be better than others when you are on dialysis. Others must be avoided completely.

## What about pregnancy?

Having both diabetes and kidney failure is serious. It can affect your health and the health of your unborn child. If you have diabetes and are thinking about becoming pregnant, talk to your healthcare team. If you become pregnant, you should be under the care of a specialist in high-risk pregnancy and a specialist in kidney disease.

### Diabetes: A Growing Epidemic

#### Did you know these facts about diabetes?

- Diabetes is the leading cause of kidney disease.
- Nearly 30 million Americans have diabetes.
- More than 224,000 people are currently living with kidney failure caused by diabetes.
- Worldwide, 347 million people have diabetes.
- At least 27 percent of people older than 65 years have diabetes.

You should:

- Ask your doctor what your blood sugar level should be while pregnant, and stay on goal.
- Keep your blood sugar level on target.
- Ask your doctor if you need to take insulin to control your blood sugar while pregnant.
- Tell your doctor about any medicines you are taking, especially medicines for high blood pressure or cholesterol.

### **Key points to remember about diabetes and kidney failure**

- About a third of people with diabetes may develop kidney failure.
- Besides the kidneys, diabetes can harm the blood vessels in the body and cause permanent damage to the heart, eyes, nerves, and feet. Careful control of blood sugar is the best way to protect them.
- Kidney failure is treated by hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis, or kidney transplantation. The type of treatment that is best depends on your overall health, lifestyle, and personal preference.

- Get regular screenings for heart and blood vessel disease.
- Get regular exercise.
- Keep body weight under control.
- Diet is a very important part of the treatment of all patients with diabetes.
- Ask your dietitian to help you create a meal plan that includes healthy food choices. Eating wisely will help you control blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol, and mineral and bone disorder.
- If prescribed, take medicines to help you control your blood sugar, blood pressure, cholesterol, anemia, and bone and mineral disorder.
- If you smoke, ask your healthcare provider about a plan to help you quit. If you don't smoke, don't start.

## Where can I get more information?

To learn more about diabetes and kidney disease, call the NKF Cares Patient Help Line toll-free at 855.NKF.CARES (855.653.2273) or email [nkfcares@kidney.org](mailto:nkfcares@kidney.org)

You may be interested in asking for free copies of the following booklets from the National Kidney Foundation:

- *GFR (Glomerular Filtration Rate): A Key to Understanding How Well Your Kidneys Are Working*  
Order #11-10-1813
- *About Chronic Kidney Disease: A Guide for Patients and Their Families* Order #11-50-0160  
[Spanish 11-50-0166]
- *Diabetes and Your Eyes, Heart, Nerves, Feet, and Kidneys*  
Order #11-10-0216
- *Choosing a Treatment for Kidney Failure* Order #11-10-0352
- *Hemodialysis: What You Need to Know* Order #11-50-0214
- *Peritoneal Dialysis: What You Need to Know* Order #11-50-0215
- *Kidney Transplant*  
Order #11-10-0304
- *If You Choose Not to Start Dialysis Treatment* Order #11-10-0330

## **Recipes for diabetes and kidney failure**

For kidney-friendly recipes for people with diabetes, visit NKF's Kidney Kitchen online at: **[www.kidney.org/patients/kidneykitchen](http://www.kidney.org/patients/kidneykitchen)**

Nutritional recommendations can vary for people with kidney failure, so before using our recipes, be sure to check with your dietitian.

You may also want to contact:

### **American Association of Diabetes Educators**

100 W. Monroe  
Suite 400  
Chicago, IL 60606  
800.338.3633

**[www.diabeteseducator.org](http://www.diabeteseducator.org)**

### **American Diabetes Association**

ATTN: National Call Center  
1701 North Beauregard Street  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
800.342.2383

**[www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)**

Learn more at **[www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org)**

The **National Kidney Foundation** is the leading organization in the U.S. dedicated to the awareness, prevention, and treatment of kidney disease for hundreds of thousands of healthcare professionals, millions of patients and their families, and tens of millions of Americans at risk.

Help fight kidney disease.

Learn more at **[www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org)**



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