



Most people live normal, healthy lives with one kidney. However, it's important to stay as healthy as possible, and protect the kidney you have.

Why do some people have one kidney?

There are three main reasons why a person may have one kidney:

- A person may be born with a single kidney. This condition is called renal agenesis. Another condition, which is called kidney dysplasia, causes a person to be born with two kidneys, but only one of them works. Most people who are born without a kidney (or with only one working kidney) lead normal, healthy lives.
- A person may have had one kidney removed during an operation in order to treat an injury or a disease like cancer.
- A person may have donated one kidney to a person who needed a kidney transplant.

What if I was born with only one working kidney?

In general, most people with a single, healthy kidney have few problems. However, long-term problems have been seen in some people. Preventing diabetes and high blood pressure and keeping a healthy weight can help preserve the health of your one kidney.

In some people who were born with just one kidney, or had a kidney removed during childhood, there is a chance of some mild loss in kidney function later in life. This usually takes 25 years or more to happen. There may also be a chance of having high blood pressure later in life. Most people with one kidney live healthy, normal lives with few health problems.

In other words, one healthy kidney can work as well as two.



Can one transplanted kidney work as well as two?

Yes. Testing has shown that a transplanted kidney can also increase in size and function.

Can a person with one kidney participate in sports?

Physical exercise is healthy and good for you. However, it's important for someone with one kidney to be careful and protect it from injury. This recommendation applies to anyone with a single kidney, including people who were born with one kidney and kidney transplant recipients. Some doctors think it is best to avoid contact sports like football, boxing, hockey, soccer, martial arts, or wrestling.

Wearing protective gear such as padded vests under clothing can help protect the kidney from injury during sports. This can help lower the risk, but it won't fully take away the risk. Talk to your healthcare provider about if participating in contact sports is a good idea. You should always think about the risks involved in any activity, and carefully consider whether the risks outweigh the benefits.

Will I need to follow a special diet?

Most people with one healthy kidney do not need to follow a special diet but should be aware that drugs and alcohol can be harmful to your body. When you have kidney disease you need to be even more careful about what you put into your body. When your kidney becomes damaged, it will not filter your blood as well as it should. In general, healthy diets include the Mediterranean and DASH diet.

If you have a kidney transplant due to kidney disease or kidney failure, you may have some other dietary needs. If you have questions about your diet, talk to your healthcare provider or a transplant dietitian.

For more information, contact the National Kidney Foundation

Toll-free help line: **855.NKF.CARES** or email: **nkfcare@kidney.org**