

# Kidney disease and prevention



The kidneys are two organs situated on either side of the abdomen. They are responsible for filtering the blood, removing all toxins, and producing urine as a waste product. The kidneys are also essential in controlling the volume of fluid in the body.

Your kidneys can be affected by a variety of diseases, including high blood pressure, diabetes, and many other conditions. Damage to the kidneys is serious. They are essential for survival. When the kidneys stop functioning, you will then go into kidney failure.

## Causes

There are many diseases that can lead to kidney disease. The most common causes include untreated high blood pressure and diabetes. However, there are a range of other conditions, including congenital conditions, certain medications, severe dehydration, HIV, and other infections that may lead to kidney failure.

## Identifying kidney disease

In the early stages of kidney failure, there will be no symptoms. The first sign of kidney damage is the presence of protein in the urine. The kidneys start behaving as an abnormal filter and allow proteins through, which is only detectable with a special urine test. Protein may appear in the urine for 5 to 10 years before any other symptoms or signs develop.

Even during moderate kidney failure there will still be no obvious symptoms, and it can only be diagnosed by the presence of protein in the urine

and through specialised blood tests which will show a gradual rise in toxins in the blood (since the kidneys are no longer filtering them).

Only during severe or final stage kidney failure will there be physical symptoms. A person may become itchy, lose muscle mass, and may have water swelling all over the body. They will feel tired and nauseous. Without a kidney transplant or dialysis, the person will die.

## Preventing kidney disease

- Get tested early for conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes.
- If you do have a medical condition like high blood pressure or diabetes, make sure it is properly controlled by taking your medication, seeing your doctor regularly and having medication doses increased when needed.
- Your doctor should screen for kidney disease, especially if you have an underlying condition. The screening test is to check for protein in the urine. A blood test to check kidney function can also be done.

Kidney failure is really a dreadful condition, often remaining undetected until it is too late. Make sure that you protect your kidneys by having regular screenings and identifying and controlling medical conditions.