

Kidney Disease and High Blood Pressure

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High blood pressure is the second leading cause of chronic kidney disease (CKD) after diabetes. If you have kidney disease, managing your high blood pressure can slow the worsening of your kidney disease.

What Is Blood Pressure?

Blood pressure measures the force of blood against the walls of arteries, much like the pressure of water in a garden hose. Your blood pressure reading has two numbers. The first number is called the “systolic” and measures pressures when the heart muscle contracts. The second number is called the “diastolic” and measures pressure when the heart muscle is relaxed.

What Is High Blood Pressure?

High blood pressure, or hypertension, occurs when the pressure of your blood against the walls of your blood vessels increases. If uncontrolled, or poorly controlled, high blood pressure can lead to heart attacks, strokes and CKD.

What You Can Do to Prevent High Blood Pressure from Worsening Your Kidney Disease

If you have high blood pressure, it is important to take all medications as prescribed, and to make the changes to your lifestyle that can help control blood pressure, including weight loss and diet.

Limit Salt

Check for sodium on food labels. Sodium is present in many processed foods, so be sure to read nutrition labels carefully. Try to limit your sodium intake to no more than 2,400 mg each day. Avoid cooking with salt whenever possible. Take the salt shaker off the table and use other seasonings and flavorings for salt. However, ask your doctor before using salt substitutes if you have kidney disease. Not everyone with high blood pressure is salt-sensitive. You can test yourself by following a low-sodium diet for two or three weeks; then re-check your blood pressure to see if it has improved.



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“Smoking may increase blood pressure and heart rate, as well as narrow the blood vessels in the kidneys.”

Watch Your Fat Intake

Limit saturated fats that are in animal products such as the fat in meats, butter, cheese and whole milk products.

Use monounsaturated fats such as canola oil and olive oil, and polyunsaturated fats including safflower oil, sunflower oil and soy oil in moderation.

Quit Smoking

Some of the possible ways smoking is thought to harm kidneys include:

- Increasing blood pressure and heart rate
- Reducing blood flow in the kidneys
- Narrowing the blood vessels in the kidneys
- Damaging the branches of the arteries (called arterioles)
- Causing arteries in the kidneys to harden and thicken (arteriosclerosis)
- Causing kidneys to lose function more quickly

In addition to tobacco, smoking allows other toxins into the body. Nicotine, the addictive ingredient in cigarettes, builds up in people with CKD. As kidney function decreases, the amount of nicotine in the body increases.

Since the number of cigarettes smoked tends to increase the risks for end stage renal failure, cutting down may be helpful. Ideally, however, quitting would be the best option. While quitting is difficult due to nicotine addiction, cravings and temptations, there are steps to help you succeed in not smoking. Sometimes it takes a few tries to stop smoking completely, but it's worth the effort to become smoke-free.

- Talk to your doctor about nicotine-replacement therapies like gums and patches, as well as medicines that reduce cravings.
- Give yourself a quit date and throw out all tobacco products.

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- Have a strategy for helping you overcome cravings, such as:
 - Chew gum, suck on hard candy, nibble on low-calorie snacks throughout the day or make your meals last longer.
 - Call a telephone-quit line, check websites or talk to friends and family members for support.
 - Try deep breathing or meditation until the urge passes.
- Join a quit-smoking program.
- Keep trying until you quit.

Exercise and Lose Excess Weight

Exercise may help your kidney condition. If you are overweight and your doctor would like you to lose extra pounds, exercise is a great way to burn fat. Exercise also strengthens muscles, including one of the most important muscles in your body, the heart.

Sometimes exercise can help you feel more energetic. People often start an exercise program and find that activities they participated in before are less tiring. This is because their muscles are becoming accustomed to activity.

Besides physical benefits, exercise can also reduce depression and anxiety, as well as improve your psychological well-being.

Depending on your current physical condition and past history of exercise, your doctor will recommend a program suited for you. If you have not exercised in a while, your doctor will want you to start slowly.