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Diabetes and kidney disease: The basics

Diabetes is one of the most common chronic conditions among people in the US and one of the leading causes of kidney disease. It can affect your overall health and quality of life—and hurt your kidneys. Understanding diabetes is important because early detection can make a big difference.

What are the two types of diabetes?

Type 1 diabetes	Type 2 diabetes
Type 1 diabetes is an autoimmune disease, meaning your immune system destroys the insulin-producing cells in your pancreas. As a result, people with type 1 diabetes don't make enough (or any) insulin. It's usually diagnosed during childhood. People with type 1 diabetes must take daily insulin injections to manage their blood sugar and give their bodies energy.	Type 2 occurs when the pancreas makes insulin, but the body doesn't use it the way it should. This can lead to high blood sugar. Type 2 is the more common form of diabetes. People with type 2 can control their blood sugar levels with diet, medication, and possibly taking insulin.

How is diabetes diagnosed?

At first, many people don't know they have diabetes, so it can go untreated for a long time. This is why routine medical care and blood tests are so important. Catching diabetes early can make a big difference in protecting your kidneys.

Reach out to your care team if you have any of these early signs:

- The need to urinate (pee) a lot, often at night
- Vision problems
- Extreme tiredness
- Extreme thirst
- Dry, itchy skin
- Extreme hunger
- Unexplained weight loss
- Numbness or tingling in your hands or feet
- Sores that heal slowly



How does diabetes affect your kidneys?

About 30% of people with Type 1 diabetes and about 10 to 40% of people with Type 2 diabetes will eventually develop end-stage kidney disease that requires treatment.

Diabetes can damage the blood vessels in your kidneys, making it hard for them to clean your blood. The high blood sugar caused by diabetes can also harm the nerves in your body, including those in your bladder. This makes it difficult to empty your bladder, which can put pressure on the kidneys and lead to damage.

If urine—especially urine that's high in sugar—stays in your bladder for too long, it can lead to a urinary tract infection (UTI). Even though this type of infection starts in the bladder, it can spread to the kidneys.

When you have diabetes, you might also have too much protein in your urine—known as albuminuria and proteinuria. This can be caused by high blood sugar levels or high blood pressure.

What risk factors make developing kidney disease more likely?

Not everyone with diabetes will develop kidney disease. There are certain risk factors that might make it more likely. Some of these include:

- A family history of diabetes and kidney disease
- Race (people who are Black, Hispanic, American Indian/Alaskan Native, and Asian American)
- Poorly controlled diabetes
- Poorly controlled blood pressure
- Obesity
- Smoking

How can you slow down kidney damage if you have diabetes?

Your care team will help you set blood sugar and blood pressure goals to slow or prevent kidney disease. Practicing healthy lifestyle habits, like quitting smoking, exercising, and eating a diabetes-friendly diet, can help manage your blood sugar and blood pressure.

Your care team may also suggest medications to help with heart issues like high blood pressure and others to decrease protein in your urine.

We are here to help

Your care team can help answer your questions about diabetes. Reach out for any support you need.

This serves only as a guide. Talk with your healthcare provider for more information based on your health needs.

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