

For Providers

Educating Patients About Chronic Kidney Disease

Four Key Concepts and Talking Points

1 Talk to patients about their kidneys, CKD, and their risk.

What is CKD? CKD (chronic kidney disease) means the kidneys are damaged and may no longer filter blood well. This damage happens over many years. As more damage occurs, the kidneys are unable to keep the body healthy—then dialysis or a kidney transplant may be needed.

How can I lower my risk for CKD? The steps you take to manage your diabetes and high blood pressure also help protect your kidneys. Diet, quitting smoking, and exercise are all important steps.

2 Communicate the importance of testing and how CKD is diagnosed.

What are the symptoms of CKD? Most people with CKD have no symptoms until their kidneys are about to fail. The only way to know if you have kidney disease is to get tested. The sooner kidney disease is found, the sooner you can take steps to begin treatment and keep your kidneys healthier longer.

How do you check for CKD? A blood test and a urine test are used to find kidney disease. Because you are at risk, you should get these tests regularly:

GFR—A blood test measures how much blood your kidneys filter each minute, which is known as your glomerular filtration rate (GFR).

Urine Protein—A urine test checks for protein in your urine. Protein can leak into the urine when the filters in the kidneys are damaged.

3 Explain the progressive nature of CKD and the basics of treatment.

Can CKD get better? CKD usually will not get better and is likely to get worse. Treatment helps slow kidney disease and keep the kidneys healthier longer.

How is CKD treated? Treatment includes keeping blood pressure below 130/80 mmHg, diet counseling to reduce salt and excessive protein, and controlling blood sugar if you have diabetes.

Are there medications for CKD? People with CKD often take medicines to lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, and lower blood cholesterol. Two types of blood pressure medications—ACE inhibitors and ARBs—can slow CKD and delay kidney failure, even in people who do not have high blood pressure.

4 Begin to speak about dialysis and transplantation.

Will I ever need dialysis? With proper management, you may never need dialysis or, at least, not for a very long time. But if your kidneys fail, we will need to choose a treatment that can replace the job of your kidneys. There are two types of dialysis—one is done at home daily and the other is done in a dialysis center three times a week.

Is kidney transplant an option? You may be able to receive a kidney transplant. The donated kidney can come from an anonymous donor who has recently died or from a living person. A kidney transplant is a treatment—not a cure.

For a more detailed version of these talking points or to order this tear-off pad, visit www.nkdep.nih.gov or call 1-866-4 KIDNEY (1-866-454-3639).

The National Kidney Disease Education Program is an initiative of the National Institutes of Health.

