

Diabetic kidney disease

Kidney damage caused by diabetes

Finding it early and protecting your kidneys can slow it down.

What is it?

Your kidneys clean your blood by removing waste and extra water. Over many years, high blood sugar can damage the kidneys' tiny filters. Damaged filters leak protein into the urine and slowly clean the blood less well.

Diabetes is one of the most common causes of kidney failure.

Who is at higher risk?

People who have had diabetes for many years, whose blood sugar or blood pressure is often high, who smoke, or who have kidney disease in the family.

What you might notice

Usually nothing early on. That's why regular tests matter. Later, you may have swelling in your feet, ankles or around your eyes, foamy urine, or feel tired, itchy or sick to your stomach.

How it's found

Two simple tests, at least once a year:

- a **blood test (eGFR)** shows how well your kidneys filter
- a **urine test (ACR)** checks for a protein called albumin

How it's treated

- Keep your blood sugar and blood pressure in the target ranges you set with your team.
- Some diabetes and blood pressure medicines also protect the kidneys and heart. Your team may suggest one or more of them.
- Cholesterol-lowering medicine protects your heart and blood vessels.

What you can do

- Take your medicines as prescribed. Bring a list of all your medicines and supplements to every visit.
- Eat less salt, be active most days and aim for a healthy weight.
- If you smoke, get help to quit.
- Avoid anti-inflammatory pain relievers (NSAIDs) unless your doctor says they're okay. Your pharmacist can tell you which products contain them.
- **Sick days:** if you're vomiting, have diarrhea or can't keep fluids down, ask your team or pharmacist which medicines to pause until you're better.

Call your health care team if

- you have new swelling, or swelling that gets worse quickly
- you're passing much less urine than usual
- you're sick and can't keep fluids down for more than a day

Learn more: Kidney Foundation of Canada, kidney.ca. Diabetes Canada, diabetes.ca.

General information only. This sheet doesn't replace advice from your own health care team. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.

Dr. Shemer Ratner, Nephrology, Sudbury, Ontario. Last updated October 2026.