



# Diabetes & your kidneys

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## Staying informed

According to the Centers for Disease Control, approximately one in three Americans with diabetes also suffers from chronic kidney disease. In fact, the American Diabetes Association says diabetes is the number-one cause of kidney disease in the U.S.

Kidney disease, like high blood pressure, is a condition that progresses silently, so you may not know you have a problem until there is irreversible damage. The good news is that you can reduce your risk of having kidney disease, or slow its progression, by working with your medical team to stay aware and keep ahead of the problem.

## Why early detection is crucial

Kidney disease moves slowly. People with type 1 diabetes may have some kidney damage within two to five years of getting a diagnosis of diabetic nephropathy, but three to four people out of ten will progress to a more severe form of the disease within ten to thirty years.

Type 2 diabetes is different, but can be even more problematic. People often don't know they have type 2 for years because its symptoms also progress slowly, so you may learn you have kidney disease shortly after you've been diagnosed. Symptoms of diabetic nephropathy include:

### 1. Swelling

Especially around your hands, face, and feet.

### 2. Excessive and prolonged hiccups

High levels of uremia—waste products that are normally secreted in your urine—can irritate the nerves of your diaphragm muscles. Most doctors define "prolonged" as 24 hours or longer.

### 3. Foamy urine

Once or twice is not a problem, but persistent foamy urine can indicate excessive protein, a potential sign of kidney disease.

### 4. Feeling unusually tired

Damaged kidneys can lead to anemia and reduced oxygen levels.

### 5. A metallic taste in your mouth

Kidneys that can't filter properly can increase the levels of ammonia in your saliva.

### 6. You don't need as much insulin

If your kidneys are working normally, they clear between 25% and 50% of insulin from your blood. If your kidneys are unable to filter properly, insulin stays in the bloodstream longer.

# Preventing kidney disease

Some of these symptoms can indicate issues other than diabetic nephropathy (or no important issues at all), but if you experience any of them, it's important to contact your doctor. Even better, take proactive steps before disease progression causes real damage. These steps include:

## 1. See your health care team on a regular basis

This is the best action you can take. Your doctor knows when to screen you for kidney disease, and the first step is usually a simple test for protein in your urine.

## 2. Keep your blood sugar under control

This requires vigilance, as you know, but it's so important in preventing kidney damage. Regular A1C tests twice a year will help you know how you're doing.

## 3. If you have high blood pressure, manage it with prescribed medications, diet, and exercise

High blood pressure can cause kidney disease by forcing high-pressure blood flow through your kidney's narrow blood vessels, which eventually causes damage. Get an at-home blood pressure cuff and have it tested at your doctor's office to make sure it's accurate.

## 4. Keep your weight down

Preserving your kidneys is just one more reason to keep an eye on your weight, as excessive pounds can damage them. When you are forced to manage a larger blood mass, your kidneys have to filter more blood than usual. Conversely, losing even just 5% or 10% of your weight can significantly reduce kidney strain.

## 5. Take over-the-counter medications only after consulting your doctor

If you already have diabetic nephropathy, certain drugs (like ibuprofen) can further damage your kidneys.

## 6. Drink lots of water

If your kidneys are working normally, they clear between 25% and 50% of insulin from your blood. If your kidneys are unable to filter properly, insulin stays in the bloodstream longer.



## Talk to your doctor about new treatments

If you already have diabetic nephropathy, drugs can help. ACE inhibitors can help by slowing the progression of the disease. Another class of drug known as SGLT2 inhibitors treat type 2 diabetes by lowering blood sugar and managing chronic kidney disorders. A newer drug called Voyxact, which was FDA-approved in 2025, reduces protein in the urine and improves kidney function. Several other drugs can also be beneficial.

Don't hesitate to ask your doctor if these drugs or others are right for you and would fit into your treatment plan. When it comes to your kidneys, it pays to be proactive.

**Sources** | <https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/diabetes-complications/diabetes-and-chronic-kidney-disease.html> | <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diabetic-nephropathy/symptoms-causes/syc-20354556> | <https://www.kidney.org/kidney-topics/diabetes-and-kidney-disease-stages-1-4> | <https://diabetes.org/kidney-care> | <https://www.nebraskamed.com/health/conditions-and-services/kidney-failure-disease/how-does-diabetes-affect-the-kidneys> | <https://www.kidney.org/news-stories/6-new-kidney-disease-medications-approved-2025>

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