

# Managing kidney disease symptoms

**Kidney disease is called a 'silent disease' as there are often no warning signs. In early chronic kidney disease, it is not uncommon for people to experience no symptoms. You can lose up to 90 per cent of your kidney function before getting any symptoms. As CKD progresses, kidney disease can make you feel sick in different ways.**

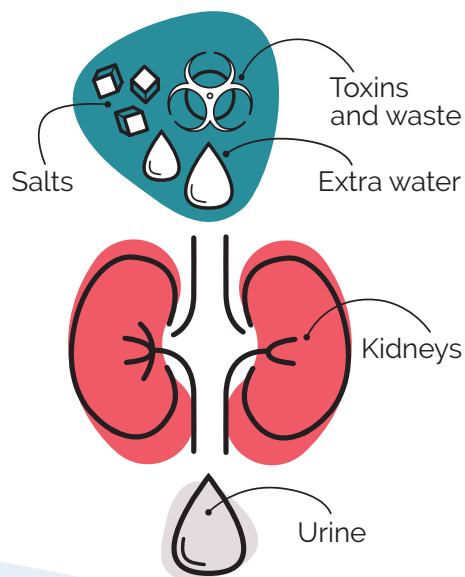
When your kidneys aren't working properly, waste and fluid build up in your body instead of being filtered into your urine.

This can be due to the disease itself or treatments like dialysis or medicines. Some symptoms might be worse than others and can affect people differently.

If you have any of these symptoms, tell your healthcare team. They might have ways to help you manage them.

You might need to regularly fill out a symptom and quality of life survey so your healthcare team can keep track of how often and how bad your symptoms are.

**Taking good care of your symptoms can make your life better.**



90%

of kidney function can be lost without experiencing any symptoms



## Low energy

Feeling very tired is common when your kidneys aren't working well. This tiredness can be different for each person. It might be caused by poor sleep, depression, or heart problems. Simple changes and treatments can help.



## Swelling

As kidney function declines, extra fluid can build up in your body, causing swelling in your legs, ankles, feet, face, or hands. Limiting salt and fluids in your diet and taking prescribed medicines can help control this.



### Mood and wellbeing

Feeling depressed, anxious, angry, or stressed is common at all stages of kidney disease. These feelings can come from the diagnosis or treatment. Therapies and medicines can help, so it's important to talk to your healthcare team.



### Bad taste, bad breath, dry mouth

When your kidney function decreases, waste builds up in your blood, causing a bad taste in your mouth and bad breath. Food might taste different, and you could lose your appetite. Your mouth might also feel dry. Using saline spray, ice, or chewing gum can help.



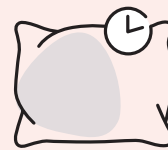
### Itchy skin

Itchy skin, also known as pruritus, is common in people with kidney disease. This can be due to chemical imbalances and dry skin. Using skin creams and talking to your pharmacist can help manage this symptom.



### Shortness of breath

Trouble breathing can be due to anaemia or fluid in the lungs. Medicines can help reduce fluid and treat anaemia, making it easier to breathe.



### Sleeping problems

Trouble sleeping can be caused by pain, worry, or other symptoms. You might still feel tired even after sleeping. Talk to your healthcare team for tips and treatments to help improve your sleep. There are medications available, but some can harm your kidneys, so make sure to discuss them with your healthcare team.



### Feeling sick (nausea and vomiting)

Nausea and vomiting can happen because of waste build-up or as a side effect of treatment. This can lead to a loss of appetite and weight loss. Eating small meals, avoiding certain foods, and taking prescribed medicines can help reduce these symptoms.



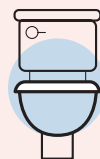
### Changes in memory, attention, and concentration

Kidney disease can make it hard to remember things, focus, and plan tasks. This might make it difficult to take your medications or follow your healthcare team's advice. If you or your family notice these changes, talk to your healthcare team for tips that might help.



### Restless legs

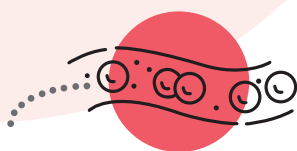
Many people with kidney failure experience uncomfortable, jittery legs, making it hard to sleep. Massages, warm baths, relaxation techniques, and exercise can provide relief. Medicines can also help.



### Constipation and diarrhoea

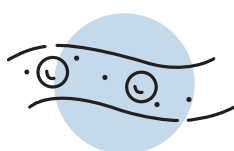
When your kidneys aren't working well, you might have bowel problems like constipation and diarrhea. This can cause stomach pain, bloating, gas, and nausea. Eating more fibre, exercising, and taking prescribed medicines can help relieve these symptoms.

Normal



The oxygen that we breathe in passes through our lungs and into our red blood cells. The red blood cells carry this oxygen to the rest of our body.

Anaemia



In anaemia, there are not enough red blood cells to carry this oxygen around the body.

### Anaemia

Anaemia happens when you don't have enough red blood cells to carry oxygen around your body. Your kidneys help your body make new red blood cells. This can make you feel tired, cold, dizzy, sad, confused, or short of breath. Talk to your doctor about medicines and diet changes that can help.

**See the Anaemia & CKD factsheet for more information.**



### Pain

Pain in your muscles, bones, joints or nerves is common if you have kidney disease. You can manage this pain with safe exercises and medicines. Physiotherapy, which includes gentle exercises, can help with muscle and bone pain. Medicines can help to relieve pain, but some medicines are not safe for people with kidney disease. Talk to your healthcare team about the best options for you.



### Bone disease

Bone disease can occur due to an imbalance of calcium and phosphate in your body. Your bones may weaken and become damaged, causing bone pain, itchy skin, and joint pain. Medications and dietary changes recommended by your healthcare team or renal dietitian can help manage this.



### Hair loss

Hair loss can be caused by low levels of protein or zinc, thyroid problems, medication side effects, or changes in dialysers. Talk to your healthcare team or renal dietitian about ensuring you get enough nutrients in your diet. Treating your hair gently can also prevent further damage.



### Things to remember:

- ✓ You can lose up to **90% of kidney function** without feeling symptoms. If you feel sick, taking care of your symptoms can make your life better. There are treatments for most symptoms, so talk to your healthcare team if something is bothering you.
- ✓ Treatments can be different depending on what's causing your symptom. They might include **medicine, diet changes, or lifestyle changes**.
- ✓ **Some medicines can hurt your kidneys**, so it's important to talk to your healthcare team about your treatments.

## What does that word mean?

**Dietitian** – Dietitians are experts in food and nutrition. They can help you set and achieve diet-related goals.

**Fluid retention** – When your body does not remove enough liquid (water). This can cause swollen or puffy ankles, face or hands.

**Haemodialysis** – A treatment for kidney failure. Your blood is pumped through special tubing to a haemodialysis machine. The machine acts like a kidney, filtering waste products from your blood before returning it to your body.

**Phosphate** – A mineral that, together with calcium, keeps your bones strong and healthy. When your kidneys are not working properly, high levels of phosphate build up in your blood. Too much phosphate causes itching and pain in your joints, such as knees, elbows, and ankles.

**Physiotherapy** – A treatment using physical methods such as massage and exercise to improve movement and pain.

**Pruritus** – Pruritus is the medical term for itch.

**Thyroid** – The thyroid gland regulates many things including body and brain growth and development, body temperature, energy levels and your metabolism.



### For more information

To access information about CKD, or kidney health, please scan the QR code.

**Free Kidney Helpline 1800 454 363**  
**kidney.org.au**



If you have a hearing or speech impairment, contact the National Relay Service on **1800 555 677** or **relayservice.com.au**. For all types of services ask for **1800 454 363**.

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This is intended as a general introduction to this topic and is not meant to substitute for your doctor's or health professional's advice. All care is taken to ensure that the information is relevant to the reader and applicable to each state in Australia. It should be noted that Kidney Health Australia recognises that each person's experience is individual and that variations do occur in treatment and management due to personal circumstances, the health professional and the state one lives in. Should you require further information always consult your doctor or health professional.