

Medicines and kidney disease

Your medications

When you take medicine/s, your kidneys or liver break them down, so the medication can do its job. This process is called drug metabolism. When you have kidney disease, your kidneys don't work as well as they should and this can change how your body responds to some medicines. So, this could mean that you may need to change or stop some medicines or take them at a different dose.

If you are seeing any new health professionals, make sure you tell them about your kidney disease, so their choice of medicines and other treatments is tailored to you. This includes providers such as your dentist, who may also prescribe medicines for you.

The medicines your doctor prescribes will depend on your overall health, the stage of your chronic kidney disease (CKD), and which treatment options will help you best. The medicines you take are likely to change over time, as your overall condition and health changes.

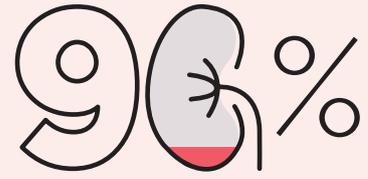


It is important to talk to your doctor or pharmacist before taking any new medicines, including those you buy 'over the counter' at the supermarket or pharmacy, to check that they are okay for your kidneys.



Medicines to help your kidneys

There are several medicines that you may take to help your kidneys. Some of these medicines may also help with other health conditions. For example, blood pressure tablets help with lowering your blood pressure but can also help your kidneys to work better for longer. Talking to your doctor or pharmacist to understand which medicines you take, what they are for and how they work, can be helpful.

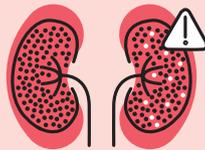


90% of kidney function can be lost without experiencing any symptoms

If you are living with CKD, you may take medicines to:



Control high blood pressure, called anti-hypertensives



Slow down the damage to your kidneys



Keep your heart healthy, for example cholesterol tablets



Lowering sugars in your blood for diabetes



Control other health conditions such as pain and arthritis



Remove excess fluid, called diuretics



Control your phosphate levels



Maintain strong bones, muscles and overall health, such as vitamin D tablets



Help with anaemia (low red blood cells)

Common medicines used in kidney disease

Most people with kidney disease are recommended to take three types of medicines. These medicines help to protect the heart or help the kidneys work better for longer. Your doctor may prescribe:

- a blood pressure medicine, called an ACE inhibitor or ARB, to slow the progression of CKD and reduce protein leaked by the kidneys
- a cholesterol medicine to lower the risk of heart attack or stroke
- a SGLT2 inhibitor to delay the progression of CKD.

If you are living with kidney disease and are not currently taking the above medicines, talk to your doctor. If you have diabetes, there are additional medicines available to help your kidneys like finerenone or injectable medicines called GLP-1 receptor agonists. Your healthcare team will help you decide which medicines are best for you.

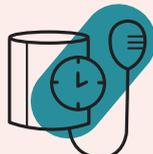
Blood pressure medicines

Most people with chronic kidney disease should be on either an **ACE inhibitor or ARB** blood pressure medicine. ACE inhibitors end in **-PRIL** and ARBS end in **-SARTAN**.

These medicines are used in CKD to:



Reduce protein from leaking in the urine.



Lower blood pressure.



Slow down the loss of your kidney function.



Prevent heart disease, such as heart attack or stroke.

Most people with CKD should be on an ACE inhibitor or an ARB, but never both at the same time.

These medicines work by blocking a hormone that causes your blood vessels to squeeze. After starting an ACE inhibitor or an ARB:

- Let your doctor know if you experience any side-effects. Common side-effects include dizziness, feeling lightheaded, or a dry cough (more common with ACE inhibitors than ARBs).
- Get emergency help if you notice signs of allergic reactions such as swelling of your face, rash, or shortness of breath.
- Get your blood tested, if ordered by your doctor, as these medicines may increase your potassium.
- Monitor your blood pressure, if recommended by your doctor.

Cholesterol medicines

Statin medicines are traditionally used to lower cholesterol levels and end with **-STATIN**. Cholesterol is a waxy substance that can get stuck in your blood vessels. High cholesterol, as well as kidney disease, increases your risk for heart disease.

Statin medicines are used to protect your heart. Ezetimibe is another cholesterol lowering medicine that can be used with or instead of statin medicines to help lower the risks to your heart.

While these medicines have great benefits for your heart, some people may experience side-effects like muscle pain, headache, or dizziness. Be sure to alert your doctor if you have side-effects, as switching to another statin medicine often helps.

SGLT2 inhibitors

SGLT2 inhibitors (end in **-FLOZIN**) have been shown to benefit the kidneys and the heart in certain people with CKD. These medicines can also be used to treat diabetes, as they help to flush sugar out through your urine (wee). Even without diabetes, SGLT2 inhibitors can help your kidneys.



Medicine side-effects

Your medicines have very important benefits for your kidneys, but some come with side-effects. Your doctor or pharmacist should let you know what side-effects to look out for. If you think your medicine is causing a side-effect, be sure to alert your doctor.

Always let your doctor know if you have side-effects to your medicines.

Certain side-effects need immediate help. Be sure to alert your doctor right away or call **0-0-0** if you are having signs of an allergic reaction such as trouble breathing, hives, swelling, or feeling like your throat is closing.

Other medicines used for diabetes and kidney disease

Finerenone and GLP-1 receptor agonists are medicines used in people with both diabetes and kidney disease.

- Finerenone helps to delay kidney failure in people with diabetes and high albumin (protein) in their urine.
- GLP-1 receptor agonists are diabetes medicines ending in **-GLUTIDE**. This type of medicine is injected into your skin once a week to help control blood sugars and slow the progression of kidney disease.

Taking your medicines

To get the full benefits of your medicines, you should:



Take your medicines as agreed with your doctor, at correct time and dose.



See your doctor regularly and complete any tests that are recommended, e.g., blood tests and urine test.



Discuss with your doctor if you have any side effects from your medicines.



Check with your doctor before starting any new medicines, including over the counter medicines, e.g., vitamins, herbal or complementary.



Talk to your doctor first before stopping any medicines.

Useful tips for managing your medications:

- Ask your doctor for a printout of your medicines and what each one helps with.
- Keep an up-to-date list of medicines in your purse, wallet, or phone so that it is always on hand.
- Teach your family or carer about your medication lists. (This can also help you remember what you have been told).
- Ask your healthcare team if there are any new medicines that might help improve your health.
- Create a list of which over-the-counter medicines you should avoid and check all non-prescribed, 'over the counter' medicines with your doctor or kidney specialist before you start taking them, including vitamins and herbal remedies.
- Talk with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about your medicines, particularly if they are causing you side effects or you are unable to afford them.
- Ask your doctor for a **Home Medicines Review**. A Home Medicines Review may involve a check of all the medicines you are taking, advice on how to best take and store them correctly.
- Have a **Sick Day Action Plan** from your doctor. All people with CKD should have a Sick Day Action Plan, which includes a list of medicines that you should temporarily stop taking if you are unwell or dehydrated, e.g., if you have gastro (runny poo and/or vomiting) or a fever. This can help to protect your kidneys from injury.



Things to remember:

- ✓ **Most people with CKD should be on an ACE inhibitor or ARB, and SGLT-2 inhibitor, and a statin. If you are not on these medicines, ask your healthcare team if they are right for you.**
- ✓ **When you have kidney disease, your kidneys don't work as well as they should, this can change how your body responds to some medicines.**
- ✓ **Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before starting new medicines or if your medicines are causing side effects. If you are seeing a new health professional, it is important that you tell them about your kidney disease, as this may influence their choice of medicines and other treatments.**

What does that word mean?

Anaemia – When there are only a small number of red blood cells in your blood, or your blood cells are not working properly. Red blood cells carry oxygen, so if you have anaemia, you can feel weak, tired, and short of breath.

Antihypertensives – Medicines used to lower high blood pressure.

Arthritis – A condition that causes pain and swelling in the joints.

Blood pressure – The pressure of the blood in the arteries as it is pumped around the body by the heart.

Cholesterol – A naturally occurring, waxy substance made by the body. It is an essential building block of cell membranes, hormones, and vitamin D.

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) – Progressive reduction in kidney function or kidney damage which is present for at least 3 months.

Diabetes – A chronic disease caused by problems with the production and/or action of insulin in the body which helps control blood sugar levels.

Diuretic – Any substance that increases the production of urine.

Drug Metabolism – When you take medicines and your kidneys or liver break them down, so the drug can do its job.

Over the Counter Medicine – Medication you can buy without the need of a prescription.

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

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 **Kidney Health**
Australia

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. Have them connect you to the Free Kidney Helpline - 1800 454 363 



**WANT TO
LEARN MORE?**

Kidney Health 4 Life is a health and wellbeing program equipping people, and those that care for them, with the knowledge and resources to take more active management of their kidney health or kidney disease.



**Join Kidney Health 4 Life
by scanning the QR code**

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.

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