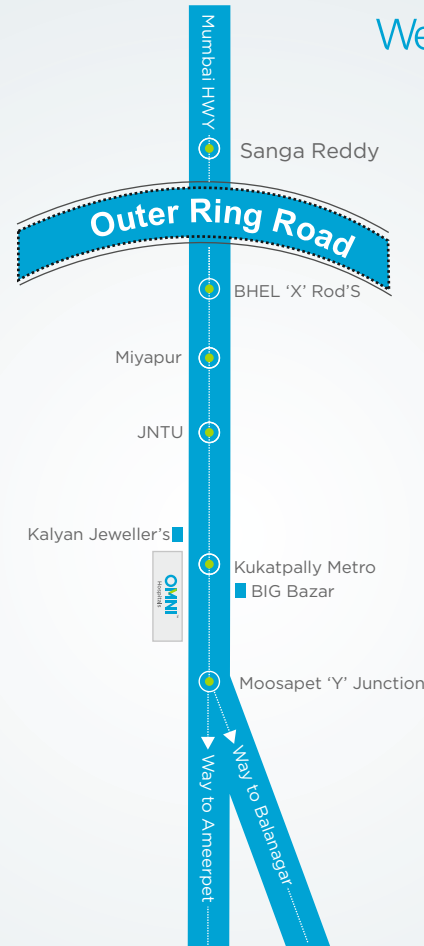


## WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT KIDNEY DISEASE?

Unfortunately, chronic kidney disease often cannot be cured. But your doctor can help you take steps to keep as healthy as possible. If you have diabetes, watch your blood glucose closely to keep it under control. Consult your doctor for the latest in treatment.

- Avoid pain pills that may make your kidney disease worse. Check with your doctor before taking any medicine.
- Exercise to keep your blood pressure and cholesterol low.
- Talk to a dietician to work out a food plan for your health needs.
- Cut down on salty, processed or canned foods that are high in sodium. Sodium may raise your blood pressure.
- Talk to your doctor about anemia, an illness in which your blood does not have enough red blood cells to carry oxygen. People with kidney disease are at higher risk for this problem.

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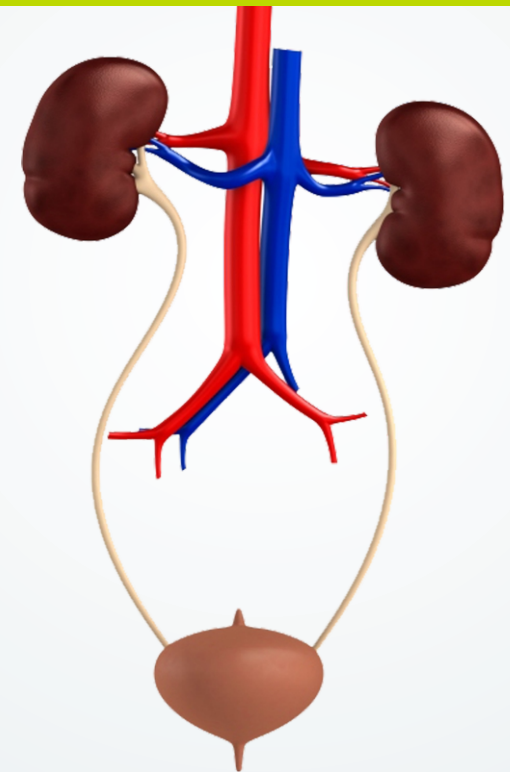
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## What You Should Know About Your Kidneys and How They Work



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## WHAT DO MY KIDNEYS DO?

Your kidneys are bean-shaped organs, each about the size of your fist. They are located near the middle of your back, just below the rib cage. The kidneys do the work of cleaning out the waste and extra water in your body. The waste and extra water become urine, which is stored in your bladder until you go to the bathroom.

In addition to removing wastes, your kidneys also release hormones that help make red blood cells, control blood pressure, and keep calcium balanced in the body.

## WHAT IS "RENAL FUNCTION"?

The work your kidneys do is called renal function. If you have two healthy kidneys, you have 100 percent of your renal function. This is more renal function than you really need. Some people are born with only one kidney, and these people are able to lead normal, healthy lives. Many people donate a kidney for transplantation to a family member or friend. In fact, you can be healthy with 50 percent of your renal function if it remains stable.

You will have some serious health problems if you have less than 20 percent of your renal function. If your renal function drops below 10 to 15 percent, you cannot live long without medical treatment.

## WHY DO KIDNEYS FAIL?

Most kidney diseases cause the kidneys to lose their cleaning ability. Damage to the kidneys may happen quickly, often because of injury or poisoning. But most kidney diseases destroy the kidneys slowly and silently. It may take years before you have symptoms.

The two most common causes of kidney disease are diabetes and high blood pressure. If your family has a history of kidney problems, you may be at risk for kidney disease.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF MY KIDNEYS FAIL COMPLETELY?

Complete and irreversible kidney failure is sometimes called end-stage renal disease, or ESRD. If your kidneys stop working completely, your body fills with extra water and waste products. Your hands or feet may swell. You will feel tired and weak because your body needs clean blood to function properly.

If your kidneys stop working completely, you will need treatment: Dialysis. With dialysis, a machine cleans the wastes from your body. This needs to be done on a regular basis, such as several times a week.

Kidney transplant. With a kidney transplant, your damaged kidney is replaced with a donated, healthy kidney, which takes over the cleaning work of your body. Sometimes, your body may reject the new kidney as "foreign." However, you can take special medications to keep your body from rejecting the new kidney.

**Please consult your doctor for more specific information about these treatments.**



## HOW WILL THE DOCTOR TEST TO SEE IF MY KIDNEYS ARE HEALTHY?

The doctor may use these tests to check your renal function:

- Blood tests help the doctor to see if you have too much creatinine or blood urea nitrogen in your blood. These are both waste products from meat protein and the usual wear and tear of muscles. If you have too much creatinine or nitrogen in your blood, this may mean that your kidneys are not working well.
- Urine tests help the doctor to see how much urine you produce a day and how much protein is leaking into your urine.
- Creatinine clearance tests help the doctor to figure out how well your kidneys are cleaning your blood.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF KIDNEY DISEASE?

People in the early stages of kidney disease may not feel sick at all.

However, if your kidney disease gets worse, you may notice:

- Bad taste in the mouth
- Feeling tired
- Feeling itchy all over your body
- Need to go to the bathroom more or less often
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Swollen or numb hands or feet
- Drowsiness or trouble concentrating
- Muscle cramps
- Skin darkening

