

# Diabetes and your kidneys

## Why kidneys are important

- Your kidneys help to clean your blood. They remove waste from the blood and pass it out of the body as urine (wee).
- Your kidneys help to balance the salt, water and acid levels in your body.
- Your kidneys help keep your blood pressure in check.

## What can happen to kidneys?

- Over time poorly controlled diabetes can cause damage to the kidneys. This can make the kidneys leak protein.
- Your kidneys can also be damaged by high blood pressure.
- You won't know if your kidneys are in trouble until the damage is done. There are special tests that can show early kidney trouble.

Your kidneys are important for good health. Remember that you won't know you have kidney problems until the damage is done. So make sure you manage your diabetes well and have your blood pressure and kidney checks done.

## Who can get kidney problems?

- People with uncontrolled blood glucose (sugar) levels.
- People with uncontrolled high blood pressure.
- People with high cholesterol (blood fat) levels.
- People who smoke.
- People who have kidney problems in their families. Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders have a higher risk of kidney problems.



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## Are there ways to prevent kidney problems?

- It is important to keep your blood glucose levels in the healthy range. Remember to take your diabetes tablets or insulin as directed by your doctor.
- Have your blood pressure checked every time you see your doctor, health worker or educator. Take your blood pressure tablets if you are supposed to.
- Have your cholesterol level checked at least once a year.
- Eat healthy foods and do regular physical activity.
- Drink plenty of water.
- If you smoke – quit.

## What are the signs of kidney damage?

- Tiredness.
- Swollen ankles.
- Shortness of breath.

*Sometimes there  
are no signs.*

## What kinds of tests are done?

- A urine (wee) test called a 'microalbumin test' shows if the kidneys are leaking protein. This test looks for tiny pieces of protein that are lost through the kidneys. To do this test you will have to take a urine sample (sometimes a 12 or 24 hour collection) to the clinic or lab. Your doctor should arrange this test to be done at least once a year.
- Sometimes special blood tests need to be done. These can show if there is a build up of wastes in the blood.

## Bladder and kidney infections

- These infections can be a problem for people with diabetes and can cause kidney damage too.
- These infections are more likely to happen in people who have high blood glucose levels, who aren't active and who have bladder trouble.

Signs don't appear  
until the kidneys are  
badly damaged.

## Is there treatment for kidney problems?

- If you have kidney problems, tablets can slow down this damage.
- If you also have high blood pressure you will need to take these tablets as well.
- Some people need to have dialysis (treatment that copies what a healthy kidney would do) at home or in a hospital or clinic if their kidneys are badly damaged.
- Kidney transplant is also an option.



### **"Hands on Country"**

*This painting was created for Australian Diabetes Council by artist Chris Tobin, a Dharug man, and a traditional custodian in the Blue Mountains region. In the artist's words: "The central part of this painting represents the relationship of the clan – it's a unity of people looking out for each other while living independent lives."*

Need more information?  
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