



AUGUST 2026 NEWSLETTER

Connection between exercise and kidney health

Exercise is very helpful when you have kidney disease because it helps to improve the health of your kidneys and other organs like your heart. Making exercise part of your daily or weekly routine will help you build muscle and strength, increase your energy levels, and your ability to do the daily activities needed to care for yourself, your family, and your home.

Exercise has the following benefits for people with kidney disease:



- Improved heart function
- Better blood pressure management
- Reduced risk for developing diabetes
- Improved blood sugar levels if you have diabetes
- Improved muscle growth and strength
- Decreased anxiety and depression
- Improved weight management

Some research has shown that exercise may help improve kidney function and anemia.



Aerobic exercise, also known as cardio, increases your heart rate and breathing rate. It involves rhythmic, repetitive movements like running that use large muscle groups. It improves heart and lung function and the health of blood vessels, all of which are important for preserving kidney health.

Keep in mind that your heart is a muscle that needs exercise like other muscles, and your lungs depend on many muscles for you to breathe properly.



Weight bearing exercises using weights or resistance bands help build and maintain your bones and muscles. Preserving bone health is important at all stages of kidney disease, and especially for people taking glucocorticoids like prednisone, which can lead to osteoporosis. Having more muscle makes it easier to maintain a healthy weight because it burns more calories at rest than fat. Maintaining a healthy weight is better for kidney health.

Some basics about exercise for people with chronic kidney disease



The saying “use it or lose it” is true, especially for people with kidney disease who are at increased risk of losing muscle mass. Staying in bed or sitting around all the time leads to less muscle strength and muscle mass, making it harder to do basic tasks. Over time, you may end up not being able to move on your own and you could develop disability. If you get moving, you can maintain and even increase your strength and keep active.



Regular exercise is important for people at all stages of kidney disease, including those on dialysis, and those who have had a transplant. Exercise should be part of your treatment plan at every point in your journey with kidney disease, including while you’re waiting for a transplant. Building muscle mass and improving muscle function, including that of lung and heart muscle, is crucial for a good outcome from surgery.

You should plan to do some type of exercise on most, if not all, days of the week. Exercise includes physical activities that engage your large muscles like gardening and walking. Discuss with your doctor and healthcare team about what types of exercise you can safely do.



Think about the types of exercise that you could enjoy the most and fit into your schedule so that you’ll have an easier time of being consistent.



People on dialysis who exercise regularly report that they sleep better, have more energy and muscle strength, and are better able to do daily tasks and activities.

Resource: National Kidney Foundation



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