



Exercise is safe for most people with chronic kidney disease, and it is good for you. It can maintain muscle strength, endurance, and the ability to be independent in your daily activities. There are many other benefits that you may experience if you exercise regularly



Benefits of exercise

Regular exercise is important for those with newly diagnosed kidney disease, those who are on dialysis, and those who have had a transplant. When you exercise regularly, it becomes easier to get around, do your everyday tasks and still have some energy left over for other activities you enjoy.

In addition to increased energy, other benefits from exercise may include:

- Improved muscle functioning and strength
- Better blood pressure control
- Reduced risk of developing diabetes
- Help control blood sugar levels in people with diabetes
- Lowered level of blood fats (cholesterol and triglycerides)
- Better sleep
- Improved anxiety and depression
- Better body weight management

People on dialysis who exercise regularly report they sleep better, have more energy and more muscle strength, and are better able to do the things they want to do.



Types of exercise

Most people with kidney disease can benefit from some type of regular exercise. There are several types of exercise:

1. **Stretching or flexibility exercises** improve the movement of joints, help in reaching above your head, and reduce stiffness in muscles
2. **Strengthening or resistance exercises** will increase strength of muscles
3. **Cardiovascular or endurance exercise** (also called “aerobic” exercise) such as walking or cycling improves the function of the heart and circulation, and results in improved endurance and energy levels

All of these types of exercise are important for overall physical fitness; however, for those who are weaker or less fit, it is best to start with stretching and strengthening exercises with gradual progression to cardiovascular exercise.

Exercise risks

There are few, if any, risks associated with physical exercise (as long as the exercises are done properly and they are started slowly and increased slowly). It may be important to increase strength and flexibility before starting a program of cardiovascular exercise.

When to exercise

Exercise at the time of day when you feel best. For some people, it is first thing in the morning. For others, it is in the afternoon or evening. If you are on:

- **Hemodialysis:** you may feel best exercising on your non-dialysis days, or before your treatment. Exercising after hemodialysis may not be best because your blood pressure may be too low. If you miss a dialysis treatment and have excessive fluid in your system, it may not be best to exercise that day.
- **Peritoneal dialysis:** you may feel more comfortable exercising on an empty stomach, so first thing in the morning may be a good choice.

It is most important to do your exercise regularly, and it is best to plan a specific time every day for your exercise session. This will help you to make exercise part of your regular routine. Here are some more tips for scheduling your exercise time:

- Wait one hour after a large meal
- Avoid the very hot times of the day
- Morning or evening seems to be the best time for exercising
- Do not exercise less than an hour before bedtime



Before beginning any exercise program, be sure to speak to your doctor about your specific health needs. Be sure to ask:

- *What types of exercise should I be doing?*
- *How often and for how long should I exercise?*
- *What level of exercise should I start with and what is my goal?*

Warning signs

It is important to listen to your body during your exercise. You should slow down or stop exercising when you:

- Feel like the exercise is hard or very hard for you to do
- Have muscle or joint discomfort or other pain that may prevent you from exercising the next day
- Are breathing too hard to have conversation with someone next to you
- Feel like your heart is racing
- Have to wait for more than an hour after exercising to feel back to normal

Other signs that you should stop exercising for the day include if you are feeling:

- Very tired
- Short of breath
- Chest pain
- Irregular or rapid heart beats
- Nauseous or sick to your stomach
- Leg cramps
- Dizzy or light-headed

Remember, you will have good days and bad days. On those days you are low on energy, try doing your exercise at a level that is slower, and you may find that the exercise actually perks you up.

When to call your doctor

Stop the exercise and contact your health care provider if you feel any of the following:

- Excessive shortness of breath
- Pain or pressure in your chest, neck or jaw
- Irregular or racing heartbeat
- Nausea
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Excessive fatigue during your exercise or that lasts all day

For more information, contact the National Kidney Foundation

Toll-free help line: **855.NKF.CARES** or email: **nkfcares@kidney.org**