

Vital Vigilance: Things to Know for National Kidney Month

March shines a spotlight on one of the body's most essential yet often overlooked organs: the kidneys. In observance of [National Kidney Month](#) (and on March 9, [World Kidney Day](#)), it's vital to educate yourself about kidney disease: its prevalence, risk factors, and preventive strategies. As we navigate key facts and figures, we'll unfold crucial steps for those diagnosed with kidney disease, emphasizing the power of awareness and proactive health management in safeguarding kidney health.

Here's what everyone should know.

Kidney Disease Is More Prevalent Than You Might Think

Kidney disease is a global health concern, affecting over 850 million people worldwide, including about 37 million Americans — and 90% of those affected don't even know they have it. Although there are many [types of kidney disorders](#), the most common is [Chronic Kidney Disease \(CKD\)](#), a progressive loss of kidney function over time. It's imperative to understand the risk factors of CKD and the most affected demographic groups in order to address it effectively.

Who Gets Kidney Disease? Major Risk Factors

The greatest **risk factors for chronic kidney disease** include diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and a family history of kidney failure. Other medical conditions and characteristics that can increase your likelihood of developing kidney disease include:

- Being over 60
- Having a low birth weight
- Using NSAIDs (ibuprofen, naproxen, full-dose aspirin, and others) for a prolonged period of time
- Having lupus or another autoimmune disorder
- Having chronic urinary tract infections
- Having kidney stones

Unfortunately, social conditions known as [social determinants of health also play a significant role in who gets kidney disease](#), as they impact people's ability to prevent or manage the disease with the resources available to them.

For example, people who receive a high-quality education are more equipped to live healthier lifestyles, qualify for lucrative careers, and seek out partners who do as well. Those whose jobs

come with standard benefits packages have greater access to essential health screenings as well as preventive and interventional healthcare. And groups who can afford housing in desirable cities and neighborhoods often enjoy more environmental health-boosting benefits, such as safety from crime, full-service grocery stores and pharmacies, greenspaces, and more.

Although anyone can develop CKD, African Americans, Latinx, Asian Americans, and Native Americans are at higher risk. This is partly because some of these groups are likelier to have medical conditions that contribute to poor kidney health, like diabetes. However, it's also partly because [structural racism](#) both causes and worsens many of the negative social determinants of health faced by communities of color, including the healthcare they need to prevent and treat disease.

In addition, [Americans who live in the rural South experience higher rates of disease and death](#) than their northern and urban counterparts, with people of color at greater risk than their White counterparts. As a result, it's essential for Americans to support education programs and services in the regions and communities where they're most needed.

How to Protect Your Kidneys and Prevent Disease

Preventing kidney disease involves a combination of lifestyle changes and regular health check-ups. Key preventive measures include:

- Maintaining a healthy diet low in sodium and processed foods
- Getting regular exercise
- Controlling blood pressure and blood sugar levels
- Avoiding tobacco and excessive alcohol consumption
- Staying hydrated
- Managing stress
- Getting adequate high-quality sleep
- Maintaining a healthy weight and taking safe, effective weight loss measures if you are overweight
- Seeing your healthcare providers regularly

Getting regular kidney function screenings, especially for those at higher risk, is also essential. Early detection and management can slow or halt the progression of the disease, highlighting the importance of regular health screenings.

Managing Kidney Disease

If you are diagnosed with kidney disease of any kind, [it's crucial to take immediate steps to manage the condition](#). This includes working closely with healthcare providers to create a personalized treatment plan, which may involve medication, lifestyle adjustments, and in advanced cases, dialysis or transplantation. Regular monitoring and managing coexisting conditions such as diabetes or hypertension are vital components of effective kidney disease management.

Kidney Disease Resources for Vulnerable Populations

If you are member of a group that is particularly vulnerable to kidney disease, it's important to seek out [healthcare resources of various kinds](#), including:

- Patient Assistance Programs (PAPs) offered by pharmaceutical companies
- Generic medications, where possible, which are often far cheaper than name-brand ones but have the same active ingredients
- Federal and state healthcare assistance programs
- Community health centers (which may be able to connect you with affordable specialized services)
- Nonprofit organizations with health-related missions and service programs

Get Kidney Health Support Services With the Alabama Kidney Foundation

Alabama ranks first in the number of dialysis patients per capita in the United States, and currently, over 1,000 Alabama residents are waiting for a kidney transplant. [The Alabama Kidney Foundation \(AKF\)](#) provides education, support services, and financial assistance to low-income kidney dialysis patients. The Foundation also provides statewide education to promote organ donation awareness and prevention of kidney disease.

We help connect patients to experts who can provide information on how to manage everything, including dialysis treatment, transplant surgery, and dealing with the mental toll that comes with a kidney disease diagnosis. [Contact us](#) today to learn how we can help you!

Wondering what you can do for Kidney Awareness Month? Join us in March, April, or May for our [Kidney Walk & Celebration events](#) throughout the state, or support these wherever you are by [donating](#) to our campaign online. Alternatively, consider volunteering with us to support Alabamian kidney health!