

# Exercise and being active



Working together for better patient information

Physical activity helps to keep your body healthy and strong. It can improve wellbeing and even reduce the symptoms of some health problems. However, it can be hard to be physically active if you are living with a long-term kidney condition and particularly if you have treatments such as dialysis.

This leaflet describes the types of exercise that are recommended for people with kidney problems and gives advice on the best ways in which to move more.

**It is important to speak to your medical team before becoming more physically active to make sure that it is suitable for your individual health situation. They may also be able to put you in touch with a physiotherapist who can help you work out the best exercise programme for your lifestyle.**



With thanks to UK Kidney Association's Physical Activity, Wellbeing and Rehabilitation (PAWR) Group



## How can physical activity help me?

Being physically active can enhance your health and wellbeing, giving you extra energy.

Other benefits may include:

- lower blood pressure
- healthier heart
- stronger bones and muscles
- better quality sleep
- improved mood and general quality of life
- healthy weight management
- control of symptoms associated with kidney disease, such as fatigue
- for dialysis patients, increased phosphate removal



## What type of physical activity should I do?

Physical activity can take many forms. Try to find one that you can do, that fits into your lifestyle and that you enjoy.

**Aerobic activities work your heart and lungs.** These include:

- walking – a pedometer or app on your phone can be a good way of monitoring your progress
- jogging
- swimming
- cycling – outdoors, or on an exercise bike
- dancing

**Strength exercises** like moderate weight-lifting can also be beneficial. You may need to avoid contact sports such as hockey and rugby. Talk to your kidney team about the activities that are safe for you to do.

## Exercise doesn't have to cost money.

Regularly walking the dog around your local park or spending time gardening can be just as beneficial as a gym membership. Some dialysis units have exercise equipment you can use while you dialyse, so talk to your kidney team to see what is available.

If you have severe kidney problems you may struggle with mobility and lack energy. You may feel that you are unable to exercise, but even a very small amount of gentle movement is better than nothing.

Community groups often offer seated aerobics classes and some swimming pools have special sessions for people undergoing rehabilitation therapy that you may be able to join. There are also lots of online resources that you can access for further guidance. See the [Kidney Care UK website](#) for more details

It is important to choose an activity that you enjoy doing as you are more likely to stick at it.



## How long should I exercise for?

**The standard government advice is to aim to exercise for around 30 minutes a day, at least five days a week.** This may not be possible, however something is better than nothing. If you are not moving very much at the moment, even being active for 10 minutes a week can reduce your risk of heart problems. If you are not used to exercising, you should build up slowly to avoid the risk of injury.

You don't have to do all the exercise in a single session. Try getting off the bus one stop earlier and walking an extra 10 minutes, or doing some stretches in front of the television in the evening. Little and often can be more beneficial than doing everything in one go.

## When should I exercise?

It is best to spread your exercise out across the week rather than doing it all on consecutive days and then nothing for the rest of the week. Some weeks you may feel able to do more exercise than others, depending on how well you feel. **It is important to listen to what your body is telling you and not do too much.**

You are more likely to keep to a regular exercise routine if you schedule it into your day. Wait for at least one hour after eating a big meal before exercising. You may also want to avoid exercising just before going to bed as it can make it harder to get to sleep.





## How hard should I exercise?

Any physical activity that you can do is better than nothing. Even gentle walking will decrease your sitting time and improve your health. However, for greater benefits, your physical activity needs to be of moderate or vigorous intensity.

The **'Talk Test'** is a simple way to judge the intensity of the activity you are doing.

- Moderate intensity – you should be able to talk but not sing.
- Vigorous intensity – you will not be able to say more than a few words without getting out of breath.

You should start each exercise session slowly to warm up your muscles. Gradually increase the intensity and then decrease it again when you are close to finishing.

**You should stop exercising if you:**

- feel very tired
- have leg cramps
- feel dizzy
- become short of breath
- have chest pain

**Remember: talk to your kidney team before starting or changing your exercise routine. You should also talk to them about physical activity if your treatment schedule changes, such as an increase in dialysis sessions.**

# Where can I find out more information?

- Kidney Care UK – [www.kidneycareuk.org/kidney-disease-information/living-with-kidney-disease](http://www.kidneycareuk.org/kidney-disease-information/living-with-kidney-disease)
- Kidney Beam is an exercise subscription service for people living with kidney disease – [www.beamfeelgood.com/home](http://www.beamfeelgood.com/home)
- NHS: CKD – [www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-disease](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-disease)

## Contact us to see how we can support you

Call free on  
**0808 801 00 00**

(Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm)

[support@kidneycareuk.org](mailto:support@kidneycareuk.org)

[www.kidneycareuk.org](http://www.kidneycareuk.org)



If you have feedback about this leaflet, please let us know at: [feedback@kidneycareuk.org](mailto:feedback@kidneycareuk.org)

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