

# Frailty: ageing with kidney problems



Working together for better patient information

Frailty is a medical term that means your body's natural ability to recover from illness or injury has been affected. This leaflet explains what frailty is and how it can impact people with kidney disease.

## What is frailty?

Frailty does not mean being small or weak. You may be affected by frailty because of a long-term condition such as chronic kidney disease (CKD) or general older age.

People living with frailty may have difficulty coping with changes in their physical or mental health and wellbeing.

Your level of frailty can change over time. It can affect your self-confidence and how you are seen and treated by others, including healthcare professionals. You may need to adapt how you live your life and find new ways to manage day-to-day tasks.

**Living with frailty does not mean that you lack the ability to make decisions for yourself or are not capable of living a full and independent life.**

## How can frailty affect me?

- **Changes in mobility and strength** You may not be able to walk or stand for as long as you used to. A lack of movement or exercise can weaken your bones and reduce your muscle strength. This can increase the risk of falls and bone fractures. It is important to tell your kidney team if you have any falls.
- **Weight loss** You may notice that you are losing weight even though you have not changed your diet.
- **More frequent and longer lasting illnesses** You may be more vulnerable to illnesses and take longer to recover.
- **Memory and concentration problems** You may find it harder to remember important things like appointments and medications. You may also find it harder to concentrate than you used to.

- **Tiredness** You may feel like your body has slowed down and that you have less energy than you used to. Healthcare professionals call this **fatigue**. It may take you longer to do normal activities such as household cleaning.
- **Changes in sleep** You may find that you need more sleep at night or that you need to sleep during the day.
- **Needing help** You may need help with shopping, travelling or with daily activities such as dressing and cleaning.



## Why is it important to talk about frailty?

Talking to your family, friends or healthcare team about any difficulties you are having is the first step to getting help and feeling better. There is no need to feel embarrassed – everyone has different abilities and needs help at times during their life.

You may find that having someone listen to you helps to reduce any stress and anxiety that your difficulties may be causing. Knowing that you are not alone in experiencing these challenges can also take away some of the loneliness that you might be feeling.

Your healthcare team can work with you to support your care. They can also signpost you to other sources of help if needed.



## What can I do to help myself?

There are lots of small things that you can do to make life easier and reduce the effects of frailty.

- Wear well-fitting shoes or slippers all the time, to reduce the chance of trips or falls.
- Keep your home clutter free. Coil up any loose electrical leads and don't leave items lying around on the floor where you might trip over them.
- Keep up to date with any recommended vaccinations.
- Ask your healthcare team for regular medication reviews to check that are taking the right combination of medicines.
- Ask your pharmacist about the best way to manage your medication and if there any pill dispensers or services available to help you.

You can also help yourself by:

### **Staying active**

It is important to keep as physically active as possible, within your own abilities. Exercise can help improve your mobility and your ability to perform physical tasks. It can also help prevent heart disease and strokes, as well as improving your thinking skills and boosting your mood.

For your own safety, it is important to choose activities which match your current physical ability. For some people this may include running, going to the local gym or taking part in exercises specifically designed for people with kidney disease. For other people, who are more physically restricted, this may mean simply standing more or taking part in seated exercise. Search online for NHS chair-based exercises.

**Talk to your healthcare team before starting a new exercise programme 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. For more information see our leaflet on **Exercise and keeping fit.**

## Keeping your mind active

Memory loss is not inevitable with age and there are lots of things that you can do to keep your mind sharp. Staying physically active, looking after your physical health and making sure that you get enough sleep are all important to help protect your brain's health. Try taking up a new hobby such as reading, sewing, crosswords or other puzzles that involve your brain having to think in different ways. A lot of people find that having an active social life helps too.

## Planning ahead

It can be helpful to think about your priorities in life (for example, family, friends, a hobby, staying at home) and to discuss these with your healthcare team. This can help ensure that you, your loved ones and your healthcare team can focus your care as much as possible on what is important to you. This is called **advance care planning**: expressing your preferences, values and goals about your future wishes and priorities for your health and care.

## Asking for help if you need it

There are lots of resources available to help with any issues you may be having. Your healthcare team can point you in the right direction to get the help you need. There is also a list of resources on the back page of this leaflet to get you started.

## What other type help is available?

The type of help you may need will depend on how frailty has affected you.

- If you need help with personal tasks such as dressing or cleaning, you may consider having a carer come into your home for a few hours a week.
- You may need special equipment at home to keep you safe and to make it easier to manage independently, such as a walking aid or bath and toilet rail.
- You could consider getting a personal alarm so that you can easily alert your loved ones or the emergency services if you have a fall or are not feeling well.

**Age UK's** website has further information about these types of support.

## Who can I ask to help me?

### **Family and friends**

Family and friends can be invaluable in helping to motivate you to stay active and maintain your social activities. They can also help with tasks that you may no longer be able to do by yourself, such as driving you to appointments or helping with the shopping.

### **Your GP**

Your GP can help you with social support, such as having carers at home. They can refer you for assessment for any equipment that you may need such as walking aids or bath rails, to help you manage better at home. They can also refer you to specialists if you need further help, for example, to a falls or memory clinic.

### **Your kidney team**

The kidney team can link you in with specialised services for people with kidney disease, such as a kidney dietitian or counsellor.



## Where can I find out more information?

- Kidney Care UK's FREE Patient Support & Advocacy Service provides one-to-one support to people with kidney disease, their families and carers. Contact us to talk through the help we can provide. Call 01420 541 424 (Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm) or visit [www.kidneycareuk.org/get-support](http://www.kidneycareuk.org/get-support)
- Age UK: [www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)
- Carers UK: [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org)
- Move project - Exercise routines for dialysis patients, developed by Bangor University: <http://move.bangor.ac.uk>
- Kidney Beam is an exercise subscription service for people living with kidney disease: [www.beamfeelgood.com/home](http://www.beamfeelgood.com/home)



## Contact us



In partnership with



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