

# Maintaining the Immune System

## Protecting the System that Protects You



*This tool has been developed by kidney patients to offer tips they have used to stay healthy.*



Your body has a protection system that helps fight infections, called the immune system. The immune system of a person with kidney disease does not work as well as the immune system of someone without kidney disease. For that reason, it is harder for you to fight infection. Below are a few suggested tips that may help you to protect your immune system and stay healthy.



### **Avoid infections.**

Do not eat raw or undercooked meats. Be sure meats are properly cooked. Use soaps and hand sanitizers that kill germs to keep your hands clean. Ask your caregivers, healthcare team, family, and friends to do the same. Clean hands help prevent germs from spreading. You should clean your hands when you are at the greatest risk of being exposed to germs.



### **Get vaccinated.**

Your doctor will suggest certain shots to help prevent infection, like one for the flu, pneumonia, or hepatitis B. These shots are important to help you stay well.



### **Eat healthy foods.**

Having a balanced diet is an important part of your treatment and can help you avoid health problems, like fluid overload and high blood potassium. You will need to control the amount of sodium, potassium, phosphorous, and fluid you take in each day. Work closely with the dietitian on your healthcare team to learn what you can eat and to make a meal plan that is right for you.



### **Exercise.**

Regular exercise can reduce cholesterol levels, control your blood sugar and blood pressure, and may help with anxiety and depression. A workout plan can also increase your energy level, make your heart stronger, and improve your muscle strength. You may be able to start slow with exercises like stretching, walking, or chair yoga. Before you start an exercise program, talk to your doctor.



### Sleep.

Get the right amount of sleep. Having too little or too much sleep can affect your health. Try to sleep for seven to eight hours a night. If you are too busy to sleep at night, it may help you to take short naps during the day. Kidney patients may have a hard time sleeping. Your doctor can suggest things that you can do to help you fall asleep.



### Quit smoking.

Smoking can slow the amount of blood that reaches your kidneys and speed up the loss of kidney function. Quitting can be very hard, so it may be helpful to start with smoking fewer cigarettes each day. You can join a quit-smoking program or call a telephone quitline. Keep trying until you quit. Talk to your healthcare team about medicine, chewing gums, patches, and other options that can help you to quit.



### Remember your other health conditions.

Many patients with kidney disease may have more than one health problem, like diabetes or high blood pressure. Do not forget to ask your doctors how you can keep your health conditions from getting worse. Make sure all your doctors have your health records and a current list of any medications that you take. Your healthcare team can help you to find ways to control your health conditions and your kidney disease.



## Talk to your healthcare team about the best ways for you to protect your immune system and stay healthy.

Share your interests, hobbies, and lifestyle. Understanding who you are will help your care providers make a plan of care that supports all of your healthcare needs.

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