

Your Lifestyle

Living Your Life

Managing a chronic disease may mean some changes to your day-to-day routine. Think about the things you want to do. They won't happen by accident, but you can take steps to live the life you want.



Work or School are Good for You!

People who have chronic kidney disease (CKD) often want to know if they can keep their jobs or go to school. In most cases, the answer is yes! Even if your kidneys fail, you may be able to keep working.

There are a lot of pluses to keeping a job. When you are working, you are:

- Earning an income
- Getting benefits
- Spending time with coworkers
- Feeling like you are part of a team

If your work is very active or you work very long hours, it may help your health to make some changes. If your employer is large enough, you may be able to get “accommodations” to help you keep working. Talk with your care team and your social worker about your options.

Many schools have staff who can help you deal with any barriers that arise while you attend. Check with the admissions or student affairs office to see what programs they have to help you. Your CKD may qualify you for a program to help you balance your school and health needs.



U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate 1st Class Kevin H. Tierney

Too Tired to Work? Get Tested & Treated for Anemia

Often, the reason people with chronic kidney disease (CKD) feel too tired to work is anemia. If you feel tired, cold, have fuzzy thinking, or no energy, see your doctor. You can get treatment for anemia that can help bring back your energy so you can work and do other things you enjoy. To learn about anemia, read the Symptoms of Kidney Disease topic. To learn about treatment for anemia, visit the Pharmacy.



Working? Don't Quit if You're Tired!

Anemia can make people so tired that they feel like they have to quit their jobs. But, if you work, think twice before you quit. Taking disability may not be your best choice. Why not?

- Disability benefits will be less than a paying job.
- It is hard to go back to work or you may find it hard to find a new job.
- Working can be a vital part of your life—giving you a sense of pride.

If you feel too tired to work, talk to your care team. Ask to be tested for anemia. The test is a blood count for hemoglobin—your level of red blood cells. To learn more about blood tests, visit the Laboratory.

Anemia can be treated—and you can have more energy to do things you want to do. The treatment for anemia can take two forms:

- Iron. Your body needs iron as a building block to make red blood cells.
- Man-made erythropoietin, or EPO.



U.S. Navy photo by Mass
Communication Specialist 1st Class
Molly A. Burgess

Concerns with Intimacy or Fertility?

Chronic kidney disease—and the illnesses that cause it—can have an impact on physical intimacy with your partner, and on whether you can father or bear children. If these things matter to you, don't be ashamed to talk to your care team.

Some treatment options for kidney failure do a better job of helping with these issues than others. Don't give up! Your care team has ways to help you. To learn more about different treatment options, visit the Treatment Room.



Can you travel with kidney disease?

Yes! The whole point of treatment for kidney disease is to let you live life to the fullest. If you have kidney failure, the treatment option you choose will make a difference. For example, travel is easier if you have had a kidney transplant.

If you are on dialysis in a clinic, your VA social worker will help you find a clinic at your travel site and fill out the forms you'll need. With some types of home dialysis, you can take your treatment with you when you travel. You can learn which options are travel-friendly by visiting the Treatment Room.



You'll Feel Best If You Stay Active

Don't let a kidney problem stop you from staying active! Being active helps your whole body to work better. It's good for your muscles—including your heart. Exercise can make you stronger and more flexible, too, so you are less likely to fall. And, it can boost your mood.



If it's been a while since you have been active, talk with your care team about how to exercise safely. Your team can refer you to a physical therapist or the VA's **MOVE!**[®] program to help you get started.

Exercise Recharges Your Batteries

Some people think their bodies are like flashlights—if they use up their battery charge, they'll run down and be tired. Not so! In fact, the reverse is true—if you don't use your body, you'll lose it. Your body is much more like a rechargeable battery. And exercise is what recharges you.



It doesn't matter if you're 80, or 90, or 100. Studies show that you can build muscle and get stronger at any age.

Find Something You ENJOY Doing

The key to being active is to focus on play, not work. Maybe there is a sport you enjoy. You might like to garden. Or, maybe you love to dance. These are just a few ideas. There are many more. Think back to what you loved to do as a kid. That may help you come up with ideas for what might be fun now. And, walking is also good exercise—and it's free.



Make a Plan for Your Life, and Follow Your Dreams

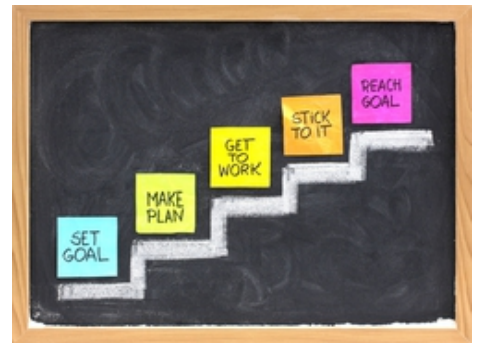
Just 50 years ago, if your kidneys failed, medicine could not save you. Today, if your kidneys fail, you get a new start. This is extra life that you would not have had before. Make it count! Do some of the things you always meant to, but didn't get around to. Think about what you want to have in your life. Make a plan to reach one of your goals. Your social worker and care team can help you.

Reach for the sky!



Set a Goal

Think of one goal that is important to you. Maybe you want to take a trip. Plant a garden. Buy or fix up a home. Write down your goal. Writing something down can be a first step to making it more real.



A Journey of 1,000 Miles Begins with Just 1 Step...

How do you reach your goals? One step at a time. Break your big goal down into smaller steps. Think about who can help you if you need it. Tell someone about your goal. Set a date to achieve your first small step. Once you do, reward yourself. The journey can be worth it, too, all by itself.



If Your Kidneys Fail, You Can Choose Comfort Care

If your kidneys fail, it will be up to you to choose a treatment. One option is medical care without dialysis, or “comfort care.”

If you make this choice, you will get treatment for pain and symptoms so you feel comfortable. This type of care will allow natural death to occur. The VA is a leader in comfort care services to help you and your family. You can spend the time you have left setting your affairs in order and saying goodbye to loved ones. Your VA care team and social worker can help you sort out your options.

