



With World Kidney Day this month, we're focusing on kidney health. Medunsa graduate, Dr Kafofora Maroka discusses how you can prevent disease and failure as far as possible. Dr Maroka has extensive knowledge of nephrology and has many years of experience in private practise.

## **Preventing and dealing with kidney failure**

Did you know that kidneys can lose up to 90% of their function and still fulfil their function? Quite remarkable! However, if more than 50-60% of the kidney gets damaged/diseased and this is not acutely treated, then kidney function will continue to deteriorate until it stops functioning. There are two kinds of kidney failure: acute, which is sudden and often reversible, and chronic, which is gradual and can only be managed, not reversed.

When kidneys fail, fluids and waste accumulate in your body and cause the symptoms of kidney failure. These symptoms can be as subtle like fatigue, feeling unwell, nausea with more serious symptoms including generalized body swelling, shortness of breath, confusion, seizures and, if not treated, will result in coma and ultimately death. These symptoms tend to only occur in the later stages of kidney failure.

## **What's the cause?**

In acute kidney failure, something causes your kidneys to suddenly stop working. This could be from kidney infection, very low blood pressure, extreme blood loss, dehydration, certain contrast dyes, rapid glomerulonephritis (damage to the filtering parts of your kidney), acute tubulointerstitial nephritis (damage to the tubules in your kidney), urinary tract obstructions, certain medications and other drugs, like NSAID's common ones including Grandpa, brufen and Voltaren amongst others.

Slow but progressive damage to the kidneys causes chronic kidney failure. This kind of damage is most commonly caused by diabetes and hypertension. Other causes include recurring kidney infections, glomerular diseases, autoimmune diseases and other inherited diseases of the kidney such as autosomal polycystic kidney disease, amongst many others.

## How can you prevent kidney failure?

High blood pressure and diabetes are the most common causes of kidney failure, and as such, much of the prevention relates to the management of these conditions.

Here are a few ways to prevent kidney failure:

- Manage your blood sugar levels: Diabetes increases your risk for heart disease and kidney failure.
- Manage your blood pressure: Having high blood pressure increases your risk of kidney failure and may cause kidney disease together with stroke and heart disease amongst others.
- Maintain a healthy weight: Being obese increases your risk of kidney failure and may cause kidney disease and heart disease. This is worse when hypertension, diabetes and obesity occur together or any combination.
- Maintain a healthy diet: Eat fruits, and vegetables, and foods that are high in fibre, and low in sugars and saturated fats.
- Drink water: Keep blood flow to your kidneys healthy by staying hydrated, unless you have already been diagnosed with advanced kidney disease in which case you need specific advice from your doctor.
- Eat less salt: This will lower your blood pressure.
- Avoid alcohol: This will help keep your weight and blood pressure down.
- Limit OTC meds: High doses of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) can cause damage to your kidneys. Always inform your pharmacist if you have kidney disease whenever you consult them, as with any other diseases, so you get the right medication that will not worsen your kidney disease.
- Quit smoking: Smoking damages kidney function as it reduces blood flow to your kidneys.
- Exercise: Regular exercise will help you maintain a healthy weight and manage any chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure.



If you suspect that you could have a kidney disease, go see your doctor for evaluation. Early diagnosis and treatment can help slow progression to complete kidney failure. If you have already been diagnosed, be sure to see your doctor regularly to monitor your kidney function.

### **Is it treatable?**

While there are treatments for both acute and chronic kidney failure, only acute kidney failure can be reversed. Your kidneys will start working again once the cause of the failure has been treated. This could be by way of antibiotics for pyelonephritis, removal of obstructions, intravenous fluids for dehydration, blood transfusions where indicated and corticosteroids for immune conditions.

Haemodialysis can be done if your kidneys don't immediately respond to treatment and are severely damaged.

Chronic kidney failure cannot be reversed, which means that the functions of the kidneys need to be performed by something else; this could be through haemodialysis which requires a dialysis machine, peritoneal dialysis through the abdomen with or without a machine, or a kidney transplant.

Living a healthy lifestyle and adhering to the advice stated above can help you prevent kidney failure or slow its progression. Be sure to manage your chronic conditions to the best of your ability, to give your kidneys the best chance you can.





If you are experiencing any of the symptoms mentioned above, please contact us on 011 933 5000 for a consult with our new Nephrologist, Dr Kafofora Maroka.

### Sources:

Nancy (MD), 3 October 2019, <https://www.healthline.com/health/kidney-health/how-to-prevent-kidney-failure#outlook>. Accessed 3 March 2021.