

**March 2025**



**Newsletter**

# Happy National Social Worker Month

**They identify sources of emotional support for patients who need it**



**Help identify services provided by federal, state and community agencies to meet your needs**

**Help you and your family cope with kidney disease**

**Jerenda, Art, Jen M, and Kimberly W**

**Help with Transplant Questions**

**Help you and your family obtain services when necessary**

**Helps with changes in the family, home, workplace and community**

**Social workers can help you and your family improve your quality of life**

# Happy National Nutrition Month



**Tom, Sarah, Tammy, Laura**

**Help with foods are right for you, and they can help you plan your meals.**

**Renal dietitians are skilled in tailoring your diet to meet your unique needs.**

**Help with refilling your binders if needed!**

**Renal dietitians go over your blood results and recommend ways to improve results if needed.**

**Help overview of bone management, dialysis adequacy, rehabilitation and anemia management.**

# Sexual Health and Kidney Disease

## Can people with kidney disease or kidney failure still enjoy sex?

It's important to remember that people with kidney failure can have healthy marriages and meaningful relationships. They can fall in love, care for families, and be sexual. Staying intimate with those you love is important. It's something everyone needs.

Many people think that sexuality refers only to sexual intercourse. But sexuality includes many things, like touching, hugging, or kissing. It includes how you feel about yourself, how well you communicate, and how willing you are to be close to someone else.

There are many things that can affect your sexuality if you have kidney disease or kidney failure — hormones, nerves, energy levels, even medicine. But there are also things you and your healthcare team can do to deal with these changes. Don't be afraid to ask questions or get help from a healthcare professional.

## What if I lose interest in sex?

Your interest in sex may change when you have kidney disease or kidney failure. At first, you may have less interest in sex. This can happen because you need a lot of energy to cope with the physical and emotional changes brought on by your illness. In time, your interest may return to normal.

Some patients may find it more difficult to have or keep an erection. This is very common with kidney failure. It can result from the side effects of medicine, having a buildup of toxic wastes in the blood that may not be fully removed by dialysis, or other things. Many of these problems can be treated. Don't be afraid to ask questions or get help from a healthcare professional.

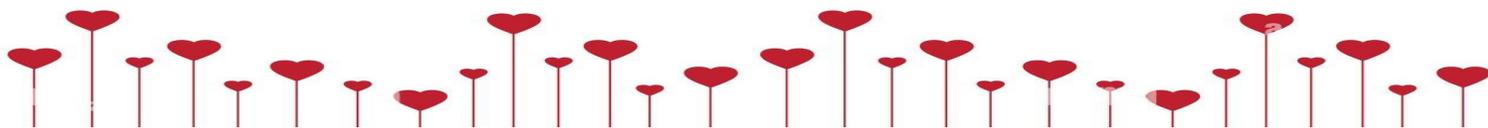
Emotions can also affect sexual functioning. This includes stress, depression, nerves, fear of disability or death, marriage problems, and much more. For some people, having kidney disease may cause physical changes that can make them feel less attractive. This can also affect sexual interest. Couples who find that their sex lives are changing should talk to their doctor or social worker. Many of these problems can be treated.

## Is sexual intercourse safe for kidney patients?

Some patients and their partners may worry that sexual activity could cause the patient's death or harm the dialysis access or transplanted kidney. No limitations need to be placed on kidney patients sexually. If sexual activity does not place pressure or tension on the access site, it will not cause damage. Fear can cause people to avoid sexual activity needlessly.

After receiving a transplant, it is important to wait until the scar has begun to heal. Once your doctor says it is all right to resume sexual activity, there is no reason to worry about damaging the transplanted kidney.

For some couples, sexual intercourse is not possible. Some may feel that sex is not as important as it once was. Activities such as touching, hugging, and kissing provide feelings of warmth and closeness even if intercourse is not involved. Professional sex therapists can recommend alternative methods.



# Sexual Health and Kidney Disease

## How will I know whether sexual problems are due to physical or emotional causes?

This requires a complete medical, psychological, and sexual history of you and your partner. Medicines should be reviewed for sexual side effects and changed if possible. Blood tests should include hormone levels and blood sugar levels to check for diabetes. Patients can be checked to see if nerve and blood supply to the penis are good and if they can have an erection. If no physical problem is found, an emotional cause must be considered.

## What can be done if the problem is physical?

Several options are available for those whose penis will not get or stay hard (erection). Penile implant surgery places inflatable or semi-rigid rods into the penis. In some cases, surgery can improve blood flow to the penis. If they do not want surgery, hormones may be given. Oral and injectable medications can cause an erection. External suction devices can make the penis hard enough for intercourse, but they require time and hand strength. Doctors with special training in impotence can give information on all options as well as their advantages, disadvantages, and side effects.

Vaginas usually have less vaginal wetness and may have pain during sexual activity. Lower hormone levels can cause vaginal dryness. Use of a water-soluble vaginal lubricant can lower or stop pain associated with intercourse. Do not use petroleum jelly because it can increase the risk of infection. Some patients may be unable to have a climax or may need more time to get "turned on" because of loss of energy, hormone changes, or medications for high blood pressure. A change in blood pressure medicine or extra hormones may be needed. Your doctor can provide information on options.

## What can be done if the problem is psychological?

Feeling worried, anxious, or depressed is normal when faced with a serious loss such as kidney disease and kidney failure. These emotions can cause loss of energy and lower interest in many activities, including sex. If a sexual problem does occur, embarrassment and guilt often follow. Fear that the problem will happen again may cause the person to shy away from sexual situations. Relaxation exercises can help to control these fears. Regular physical exercise and activity help keep the mind busy and can improve physical condition and body image. If sexual problems continue, sex therapy can help. Even if the problem is psychological, some of the treatment options mentioned for physical problems may be helpful.

## Can sex therapy help?

Sex therapy deals with the sexual problems of couples and individuals. The first step in sex therapy may be sexual education for the individual or couple. The therapist may assign activities to be done at home. These include communication exercises, stress reduction activities, and practicing ways of improving skills in giving and receiving enjoyable touches. Sex therapy can help with problems such as low sexual interest, trouble in reaching climax or reaching climax too soon, pain during sexual activity, and erection difficulties. Therapy also can help a person work through the effects of chronic illness on sexual functioning.

A sex therapist can be a psychiatrist, psychologist, physician, or social worker. Look for someone who is licensed and who has advanced training and experience in sexuality and sexual problems. Charges vary and may be covered partly by insurance.





## MISSING OR SHORTENING DIALYSIS TREATMENTS

It is that time of year when the temperatures are still colder outside, some days remain gray, and snow can linger on the ground. These are some reasons a person might think about shortening or skipping their dialysis treatments. However, there is a lot known about the effect missing dialysis treatments can have on one's health.

For example, did you know that shortening each hemodialysis treatment by 20 minutes can equal 13 missed treatments in a year? This is the same as missing one month of dialysis treatments. Similarly, missing one treatment each week is equivalent to missing 52 dialysis treatments in a year. This is similar to missing 4 months of hemodialysis treatments. And, that's not all. It is also important to know that shortening dialysis treatments by 5-10 can lead to health complications that can accumulate over time.

Common complications from shortening or skipping dialysis treatments include the build up of fluid in your body leading to shortness of breath, puffy feet, hands, arms, and/or eyes, and feeling more tired than usual. Retaining extra fluid in your body can cause your blood pressure to go up and weight to be higher. Trying to remove the extra fluid during the next dialysis treatment may cause cramping, headaches, low blood pressure, and nausea.

In addition, levels of electrolytes like potassium and phosphorus can be high if dialysis treatments are shortened or skipped. High levels of potassium can cause heart problems like arrhythmias, which are abnormal heart beats, that may lead to a heart attack, or even death. Higher levels of phosphorus in your body when dialysis treatments are shortened or skipped can weaken your bones, cause calcium deposits to build up in your eyes, lungs, and blood vessels that may damage your heart over time.

Staying on dialysis for the right amount of time each treatment helps to make sure your blood has been properly cleaned. Completing dialysis treatments to the very end will help you feel better, keep you out of the hospital, improve your overall health, and help you to live longer

### Tips to help people complete their dialysis treatments as prescribed include:

- Keep an electronic or paper calendar of your dialysis schedule.
  - ⇒ Block out time for your dialysis treatments, including travel time to and from your treatment, if you receive dialysis in-center.
  - ⇒ Block out meeting times with your healthcare team if they are not held during your dialysis treatment.
- Utilize your treatment time wisely, especially if you do dialysis during the day.
  - ⇒ Read a book, go through your email and US mail, review recipes and make a list of meals and groceries for the week, listen to your favorite music, keep a journal, sleep, etc.

### Tips to help people stay healthy to avoid shortening or skipping dialysis treatments include:

- Work with the dietitian to follow a healthy kidney-friendly diet and plan kidney-friendly meals.
- Be physically active throughout the day doing household chores, walking, and even lifting hand-held weights, water bottles, or cans of food to maintain muscle mass.
- Get quality sleep by going to bed and awaking at similar times each day, sleep in a cool, dark, and quiet room. Also, avoid exercising, eating heavy meals, drinking caffeine and/or alcohol, and smoking before going to bed.
- Reduce feeling stressed by spending time with family and/or friends who support you and make you feel good, watch or listen to videos that make you laugh, get quality sleep, and do chair yoga for relaxation. Contact your DCL social worker for other ways to reduce your stress.

Reach out to your DCL team if you are struggling with completing your dialysis treatments as prescribed. We are here to support your health and well-being along the way!

## ESSENTIAL FOOD SAFETY TIPS FOR THE HOME

Cooking at home can be a delightful and rewarding experience, but it's crucial to follow food safety practices to prevent foodborne illnesses. Here are some essential tips to keep your kitchen safe and your meals healthy:

### 1. Cleanliness is Key



- \* **Wash Your Hands:** Always wash your hands with warm, soapy water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food.
- \* **Sanitize Surfaces:** Clean countertops, cutting boards, and utensils with hot, soapy water after each use to prevent cross-contamination.
- \* **Rinse Produce:** Rinse fruits and vegetables under running water before eating, cutting, or cooking them. Avoid using soap or bleach on produce.



### 2. Separate to Prevent Cross-Contamination

- \* **Keep Raw and Cooked Foods Apart:** Use separate cutting boards for raw meat, poultry, and seafood, and another for fruits and vegetables.
- \* **Store Safely:** In your refrigerator, keep raw meat, poultry, and seafood on the bottom shelf to prevent their juices from dripping onto other foods.



### 3. Cook to Safe Temperatures

- \* **Use a Food Thermometer:** Ensure that foods are cooked to the right temperature to kill harmful bacteria. For example, cook poultry to 165°F (74°C), ground meats to 160°F (71°C), and fish to 145°F (63°C).
- \* **Avoid Partial Cooking:** Do not partially cook food with the intention of finishing it later. This can allow bacteria to grow.



### 4. Chill Properly

- \* **Refrigerate Promptly:** Refrigerate perishable foods within two hours. If the temperature is above 90°F (32°C), refrigerate within one hour.
- \* **Thaw Safely:** Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator, under cold running water, or in the microwave. Never thaw foods on the counter.



### 5. Be Mindful of Food Storage

- \* **Check Expiration Dates:** Regularly check the expiration dates on food items and use or discard them accordingly.
- \* **Store Leftovers Correctly:** Store leftovers in airtight containers and consume them within three to four days.

By following these simple yet effective food safety tips, you can ensure that your home-cooked meals are not only delicious but also safe for you and your loved ones. Any other questions, please contact your renal dietitian for further tips on preventing food borne illness! Happy cooking!