



# Family Reunion Health Guide

**Make Kidney Health a Family Reunion Affair**

NATIONAL KIDNEY DISEASE EDUCATION PROGRAM

A large, stylized graphic of a leafy branch, rendered in a lighter shade of blue than the background, occupies the left side of the page. The leaves are elongated and pointed, with visible veins. The branch curves upwards and then downwards.

# Table of Contents



## Make Health a Family Reunion Affair

Family reunions are fun. You have a chance to talk about old times with relatives, honor ancestors, and sample favorite family recipes. You also have a chance to enjoy being together. And while the family is together, it is a great time to talk about family health. It is a great time to make the kidney connection.

This guide was developed by the National Kidney Disease Education Program (NKDEP), as part of the *Family Reunion Initiative*. It will help you talk to your family about kidney disease and its connection to diabetes and high blood pressure. You may know family members who have diabetes or high blood pressure or both. What you may not know is that **diabetes** and **high blood pressure** are the **two leading causes of kidney failure**. Kidney failure affects African Americans more than other groups.

That is why it is important to talk to your family about the risk factors for kidney disease. It is important to talk about the need to get tested, and how kidney disease can be treated.

This guide contains the basic information needed to talk to your family about kidney disease. The guide includes steps they can take to protect their kidneys. It is specifically designed for family reunion planners, but anyone planning or attending a reunion or any family gathering may find this guide useful. Either way, you are helping to start (or continue) an important conversation about family health. You are making the kidney connection.

**The guide includes three sample approaches for presenting kidney health information:**

1. Talking one-on-one with family members at risk for kidney disease
2. Conducting a 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection health discussion at your family reunion
3. Connecting with family members by email, online, and on the phone



These approaches are only suggestions. Feel free to present the information in a way that is comfortable for you and interesting to your family. Sharing this information can go a long way toward helping ensure that family members enjoy many more reunions to come. You may print and hand out the fact sheets in the links below. You also may play and share the Make the Kidney Connection video.

**Thank you for making the kidney connection!**

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## Fact Sheets and Handouts



# Approach 1:

## The 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection Health Discussion

If you think your family members would be open to a short talk at your reunion, consider conducting this 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection health discussion. The conversation includes a quick overview of the most important information your family members should know about kidney disease. These are: how to know if they are at risk, how to get tested, and what can be done if they have kidney disease.

Here's how it works. Talking points appear in boxes throughout this guide. Feel free to put the information into your own words and be creative.

If you have a full weekend of activities for your family reunion, you may include this conversation during the reunion's opening reception/meet and greet dinner. You could also carve out a time during the family cookout or the closing dinner to talk about health. Send your family off with tips to live healthier until the next family gathering.

If there is time in the reunion schedule, and your family is interested, arrange to have health professionals conduct screenings. The professionals may check blood pressure, check weight, and even conduct glucose tests.

Use the talking points in the boxes to guide your discussion with your family.

### Note about Health Screenings

Many areas require health department approvals for drawing blood and often there is a cost for it. Tap family members who are nurses or medical professionals to coordinate the screenings. Reach out to organizations like the American Kidney Fund ([kidneyfund.org](http://kidneyfund.org)) and National Kidney Foundation ([kidney.org](http://kidney.org)) to see if they may work with you. Contact these organizations early in your planning process to make arrangements.



# Approach 1:

## The 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection Health Discussion *(Continued)*

### 1. Introduce the session

Thank you for giving me some time today to talk about an important health issue. This issue is kidney disease. I recently learned that more and more people are being diagnosed with kidney disease and experiencing kidney failure. This includes African Americans. When people have kidney failure, it means they have to go on dialysis or get a kidney transplant to live healthier longer. Many people who have a greater chance of getting kidney disease don't know they are at risk. I want us all to have many more reunions together, so I want to share this information with you.

#### Why should we know about kidney disease?

- Because the number of people with kidney disease is increasing rapidly. More than 20 million people, ages 20 years and older in the United States, already have it.
- Because kidney failure strikes African Americans more than other groups.
- Because it is very likely that some of us are at risk. Some of us may know it, and others may not.
- And, finally, because there's good news. Kidney disease can be treated, and kidney failure can be prevented! I want to make sure we all know what we can do to protect our kidneys.



### Approach 1 Tip

To make a greater connection with the family, include personal stories in your health discussion. Talk about your own story or have another family member share how he or she manages diabetes or high blood pressure.

# Approach 1:

## The 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection Health Discussion *(Continued)*

### 2. Talk about kidney disease risk factors

Diabetes and high blood pressure are the **two main risk factors** for kidney disease. A family history of kidney failure and having cardiovascular disease also puts you at risk. Keep in mind that your family members may know that they or other members of the family have diabetes or high blood pressure. They also may know that a close family member (mother, father, sister, or brother) has kidney disease or kidney failure. But they may not know that having any one of these conditions or “risk factors” means they are more likely than other people to develop kidney disease.

Find out what your family members know about kidney disease risk factors.

**Okay, who can name one of the leading causes of kidney disease?**

Give family members a chance to offer some possible causes. You are likely to get a variety of answers. But the leading causes of kidney disease are: diabetes and high blood pressure. Remember, having just one of these risk factors increases the risk of developing kidney disease.

**Diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney disease. Cardiovascular disease and a family history of kidney failure—a mother, father, sister, or brother had kidney failure—also increases a person’s chance of getting kidney disease.**

**So, if you have diabetes OR high blood pressure OR cardiovascular disease OR a family history of kidney failure, you are at high risk of developing kidney disease.**

**You don’t have to raise your hand, but think about it. How many of you are at risk for kidney disease? How many of you know a family member who is at risk?**

# Approach 1:

## The 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection Health Discussion *(Continued)*

### 3. Talk about testing and treatment

There are **two tests** people at risk for kidney disease should have. The first test is a blood test. This test is used to check your GFR. GFR stands for glomerular (gloh-MAIR-yoo-lar) filtration rate. It tells how well your kidneys are filtering. The second test is a urine test. This test is used to check for albumin in your urine. Albumin is a protein that can pass into the urine when the kidneys are damaged.

It also is important to have your blood pressure checked regularly. High blood pressure can be a sign of kidney disease. Encourage your family to keep their blood pressure at or below the number set by their health care provider.

So, what do you do if you are at risk? See your health care provider. Ask your provider for tests to learn how your kidneys are doing. Testing is the only way to know if you have kidney disease. Many people don't know they have kidney disease until their kidneys are just about to fail. By then, it is too late to do anything other than begin dialysis or have a kidney transplant to be able to live healthier longer.

That's why testing is so important. The health care provider tests your blood and urine to check how well your kidneys are filtering and to see if protein is passing into your urine. If protein is passing into your urine, it's a sign the kidneys are damaged. The good news is that if kidney damage is found, there are medicines you can take. For some people, the medication can keep the kidneys from failing. Also, there are other things you can do to slow down kidney damage.

So, if you have even ONE of the risk factors we've been talking about—diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, or a family history of kidney failure—ask your health care provider to test your kidneys.



# Approach 1:

## The 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection Health Discussion *(Continued)*

### 4. Talk about other steps to take to protect the kidneys

It's also important to control your diabetes and high blood pressure. By following your health care provider's advice—whether that means taking medication, following a special diet, or exercising—you help reduce the stress on your heart and blood vessels. This helps reduce the risk for kidney disease. But even if you have your diabetes and high blood pressure under control, it is important to have your kidneys tested so you can know how they are doing.



### Approach 1 Tip

Copy the fact sheets in this guide.

Share them with your family members. Share NKDEP brochures about diabetes and high blood pressure. Encourage family members to take the information with them when they go to their health care provider.

### 5. Encourage family members to look out for one another

Here are two suggestions you may try with your family.



#### Designate family health buddies

Designate a “family health buddy” for each family member. Ask family members to pair up and exchange contact information. Then, ask everyone to commit to follow up with their family health buddy at some point over the next three months to check on his or her health. Recommend they use e-mail, phone calls, social media, and even text messages to encourage and support each other regularly.

Encourage family members to continue to follow up with each other. This is especially important for those who have kidney disease risk factors or other illnesses.

# Approach 1:

## The 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection Health Discussion *(Continued)*



### Create a follow-up list of family members at risk

If your family talks openly about personal health conditions, you already may know which members of your family have one or more kidney disease risk factors.

Make a list of these family members. Ask others to let you know—either during the session or afterward—if they have diabetes, high blood pressure, or cardiovascular disease. Also ask others to let you know if their mother, father, sister, or brother had kidney disease or kidney failure.

Collect their contact information and follow up with a call, email, personal note, or visit sometime over the next three months. Encourage them to talk to their health care provider about getting tested for kidney disease.

A friendly reminder gives you and other family members a chance to express your concern. It may be just what the family member at risk needs to take the next step.

## 6. End the session

Thank everyone for their attention. Thank them also for agreeing to look out for each other. If you would like to distribute NKDEP materials to your family members, visit [nkdep.nih.gov/resources.shtml](https://nkdep.nih.gov/resources.shtml). You can download information from the website and copy it, or you can order hard copies for free.

Encourage family members who are involved in their faith communities to conduct a Kidney Sundays session. To learn more about Kidney Sundays, visit [nkdep.nih.gov/get-involved.shtml](https://nkdep.nih.gov/get-involved.shtml). You also may call 1-800-860-8747.

Let family members know they also can get more information about diabetes, weight control, and high blood pressure.

- To learn more about diabetes, visit the National Diabetes Education Program website ([ndep.nih.gov](https://ndep.nih.gov)), or call 1-800-860-8747.
- For more information about weight control and physical activity, visit the Weight-control Information Network website ([win.niddk.nih.gov](https://win.niddk.nih.gov)), or call 1-800-860-8747.
- To learn more about managing high blood pressure, call the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) at 1-301-592-8573, or visit the Institute online at [www.nhlbi.nih.gov](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov). The International Society on Hypertension in Blacks (ISHIB) also has information online at [ishib.org](https://ishib.org).



## Approach 2:

### Talking One-on-One

You can include health information at your reunion by talking one-on-one with family members at risk for kidney disease.

You already may know which family members have diabetes or high blood pressure. You also may need to ask others in your family to help you identify them.

Start a conversation with these family members, and help them make the connection between their diabetes or high blood pressure, and their kidney function. If you have a family history of kidney failure, talk about it with your relatives.



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### Approach 2 Tip

**If your family has a history of kidney failure, talk about it.**

# Approach 2:

## Talking One-on-One *(Continued)*

### **Below are some helpful talking points**

- I know that you have [diabetes and/or high blood pressure]. I recently learned that diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney failure. Do you know if you've been tested for kidney disease?
- Don't wait for symptoms. Early kidney disease has no symptoms. Many people don't know they have it until just before the kidneys fail. If your kidneys fail, you'll have to either go on dialysis or get a kidney transplant to live healthier longer.
- There are two tests that check for kidney disease—a blood test and a urine test. Testing is the only way to know if you have kidney disease. So please talk to your health care provider about getting tested.
- If you have kidney disease, there are medicines called ACE inhibitors and ARBs you can take. There also are other things you can do to help delay or prevent kidney failure. This is why testing is so important.

# Approach 2:

## Talking One-on-One *(Continued)*

### Tips for approaching family members

- ➡ Sometimes it can be awkward talking to family members one-on-one about personal health issues. Keep these tips in mind when approaching family members at risk:
- ➡ Familiarize yourself with the fact sheets in this guide . Offer to help family members find more information. Start with the toll-free numbers and websites listed in the guide.
- ➡ Ask permission to have the conversation. Choose the right time and environment. A quiet, private place that is free from distractions is best.
- ➡ If a family member is not comfortable talking about his or her health, don't force a discussion. Express your feelings of concern. Let him know that you'll be ready to talk whenever he is. Make sure your family members know you care about them and their health.
- ➡ Acknowledge that it is not always easy to face personal health problems. Be supportive and listen. Emphasize that the final decision to talk to the health care provider is theirs.
- ➡ Offer to go with them to the health care provider.



## Approach 3:

### Connect with Family Members by E-mail, Online, and on the Phone

Technology makes it easier to connect with family members. You do not have to wait until your family reunion to talk about the family's health.

The message template on the may be personalized and e-mailed to family members. Make your own changes based on your personal style. Copy and paste the note into the body of an e-mail, a Facebook message, a newsletter, or a blog template. If your family reunion has a website or your family has a blog, you may post a message there, too.

You also may attach a PDF of the NKDEP Questions & Answers About the Kidneys and Kidney Disease fact sheet to the e-mail to share it with your loved ones. The PDF is available in the NKDEP Online Resource Center ([nkdep.nih.gov/resources.shtml](https://www.nkdep.nih.gov/resources.shtml)). You can post this message as a note on Facebook, tagging family members and loved ones. You also may include the message in your family reunion newsletter.

### Approach 3 Tip

Every now and then, check in with family members following your reunion.



# Approach 3:

## Connect with Family Members by E-mail, Online and on the Phone *(Continued)*

### 1. Send a Kidney Health Message

Hi Family,

I came across this information and thought it would be helpful. I recently learned that diabetes and high blood pressure are the leading causes of kidney failure. Many of us are living with diabetes and high blood pressure. Some of us may not know that these conditions put us at risk of developing kidney disease.

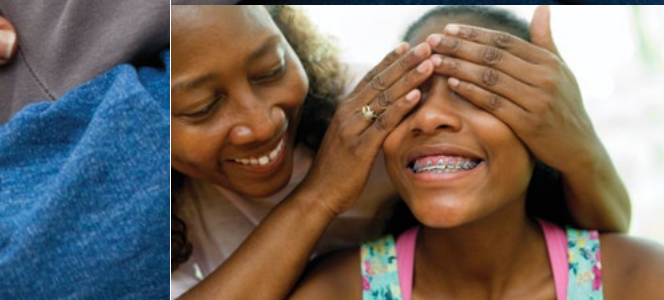
Kidney disease is serious. It can cause the kidneys to fail. This means a person must either go on dialysis or get a kidney transplant to live healthier longer. We have a family history of kidney failure, and that puts many of us at risk too. The good news is that there are things we can do to protect our kidneys.

Please read the attached information. If you are at risk for kidney disease, talk to your health care provider about getting tested and about other ways to protect your kidneys and stay healthy. Let's make sure there are many more family reunions, birthdays, and family gatherings for all of us. Let's commit to supporting each other when it comes to our health.

For more information about kidney disease, call 1-800-860-8747 or visit [nkdep.nih.gov](http://nkdep.nih.gov). Join me online and like the Make the Kidney Connection page on Facebook ([facebook.com/makethekidneyconnection](https://facebook.com/makethekidneyconnection)).

With Love,

[Name here]



## Approach 3 (Continued)

You can also send a series of text messages or quick e-mails to family members.

### Before the Reunion

1. Hi family! Taking care of your kidneys is important. We'll be talking about kidney health at the reunion.
2. Hi family! Did you know that diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney failure? We'll talk more about it at the reunion.
3. Hi family! Your health is important. If you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or cardiovascular disease, don't miss our kidney health conversation at the reunion.

### After the Reunion

1. Hi family! Your health is important. If you have diabetes, high blood pressure, or cardiovascular disease don't forget to talk with your health care provider about kidney disease testing.
2. Hi family! Be sure to maintain a healthy weight, be physically active, and reduce sodium in your diet. Ask me how.
3. Hi family! Have you checked in on your Health Buddy this week? Make a promise to support each other. Strive for healthier kidneys.





## Share Materials

The *Family Reunion Initiative* can be tailored for your family. No matter which approach you choose, be sure to share materials included in the back pocket of this guide. You also may print and distribute materials from the NKDEP website Resource Center ([nkdep.nih.gov/resources.shtml](https://nkdep.nih.gov/resources.shtml)).

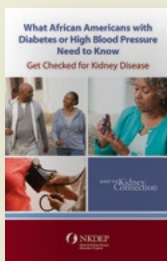
You can order some of the materials by calling 1-800-860-8747. Look for the *Family Reunion Health Package* to get everything you need. One package is free. For larger quantities, there is a small charge. You also may order individual brochures and pieces.

# Shared Materials (Continued)



## Hand out the **Kidney Disease, Diabetes & High Blood Pressure** fact sheets.

The fact sheets provide answers to common questions about **kidney disease**, **diabetes**, and **high blood pressure**. They explain symptoms, risk factors, and prevention tips, as well as where to go for more information. Be sure to offer fact sheets to family members. You also can direct your family to the NKDEP website ([nkdep.nih.gov](http://nkdep.nih.gov)) for more information.



## Hand out the **What African Americans with Diabetes or High Blood Pressure Need to Know** brochure.

This brochure provides information about kidney disease and its connection to diabetes and high blood pressure and the importance of getting tested. Use the brochure to guide the conversation and give it to family members to take home.



## Distribute the **Make the Kidney Connection** informational card.

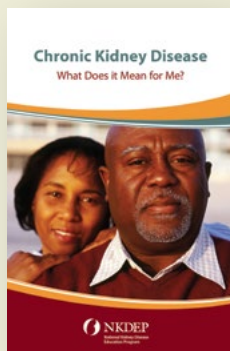
The informational card explains the risk factors for kidney disease and the importance of getting tested. It also highlights NKDEP's Kidney Sundays, an initiative that helps faith communities talk about kidney disease ([nkdep.nih.gov//get-involved/talk-with-faith-community.shtml](http://nkdep.nih.gov//get-involved/talk-with-faith-community.shtml)). You can insert the informational card into your reunion's weekend program or share them at any gathering.

# Shared Materials (Continued)



## **Distribute the [Make the Kidney Connection Food Tips and Healthy Eating Ideas](#) fact sheet.**

Learn how to eat healthy with the Make the Kidney Connection Food Tips and Healthy Eating Ideas. This handout provides information on reducing portion size and choosing healthier food options. Think about sharing the healthier food options during your reunion cookout or banquet. When preparing for your conversation about kidney disease, print copies of the food tips and healthy eating ideas to distribute to family members. Make sure they take a copy home.



## **Distribute the [Chronic Kidney Disease: What Does it Mean for Me?](#) brochure.**

If you have family members who have been told they have kidney disease, you can help them learn what this diagnosis means, and learn what it means for their health and their lives. People with kidney disease can and should continue to live their lives in a normal way: working, enjoying friends and family, and staying active. They also need to make some changes. This brochure will help answer some of the questions they might have.

# Planning Tips



## **Planning Tip 1. | Create a family history health chart.**

A Web-based tool for making a family health portrait can be found at [familyhistory.hhs.gov](https://familyhistory.hhs.gov).



**Planning Tip 2. | Develop a Family Reunion Facebook page** and help family members stay in touch throughout the year. Share suggestions and words of encouragement about living healthier.



**Planning Tip 3. | Encourage those who are members of a faith family to share kidney health information by conducting a Kidney Sundays session** at their place of worship. Visit [nkdep.nih.gov/get-involved.shtml](https://nkdep.nih.gov/get-involved.shtml) to learn more.



**Planning Tip 4. | Know your numbers.** Arrange to have health professionals check blood pressure at your reunion.



# Planning Tips (Continued)



**Planning Tip 5. | Share food substitutions and health-conscious meal information** with your family. Visit the online Resource Center to download the healthy food tips fact sheet ([nkdep.nih.gov/resources.shtml](http://nkdep.nih.gov/resources.shtml)).



**Planning Tip 6. | Find additional information on kidney health** at [nkdep.nih.gov](http://nkdep.nih.gov). Register for our e-newsletter for monthly tips to share with your loved ones.



**Planning Tip 7. | Get the younger generation involved.** Ask for their help to encourage older adults to adjust treasured family recipes with healthier food substitutions.



**Planning Tip 8. | Inspire others.** Share your family's story on the Make the Kidney Connection Facebook page ([facebook.com/makethekidneyconnection](https://facebook.com/makethekidneyconnection)).

The National Kidney Disease Education Program (NKDEP) encourages people to get tested for kidney disease and educates those with kidney disease and their health care providers about treatments that can help delay or prevent kidney failure. NKDEP is a program of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

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Participants in clinical trials can play a more active role in their own health care, gain access to new research treatments before they are widely available, and help others by contributing to medical research. For more information, visit [nkdep.nih.gov/get-involved/talk-with-family.shtm](http://nkdep.nih.gov/get-involved/talk-with-family.shtm).

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