Family Reunion Kidney Health Guide

NIH National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

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Make Health a Family Reunion Priority

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, this is a great time to talk about family health. This is a great time to make the kidney connection.

This guide was developed by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. Use this guide to 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. Talk to your family 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 family members can take to protect their kidneys. Although the guide was specifically designed for family reunion planners, 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. Conducting a 15-minute Make the Kidney Connection health discussion at your family reunion
2. Talking one-on-one with family members at risk for kidney disease
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 to help ensure your family members enjoy many more reunions to come.

Thank you for making the kidney connection!

Visit the NIDDK website to find more information on the following:

- Kidney Disease
- Diabetes
- High Blood Pressure and Kidney Disease

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. This includes: 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 or 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. Ask family members who are nurses or medical professionals to coordinate the screenings. Reach out to organizations like the National Kidney Foundation to see if they can work with you. Contact organizations early in your planning process to make arrangements.

1. Introduce the session

"Thank you for giving me time 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 an increased 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?

- The number of people with kidney disease is increasing rapidly. About 37 million people in the United States, ages 20 years and older, already have kidney disease.
- Kidney failure strikes African Americans more than other groups.
- Some of us may know we're at risk of getting kidney disease, others may not. 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.

Tip

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

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 (diseases that affect the heart or blood vessels) also put you at risk. Keep in mind that your family members may know 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.

You might say:

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

Give family members a chance to offer some possible causes. You are likely to get a variety of answers. 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?"**

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. The GFR rate shows how well your kidneys are filtering. The second test is a urine test. This test is used to check for albumin (al-BYOO-min) in your urine. Albumin is a protein that can pass into the urine when the kidneys are damaged.

Check your blood pressure 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 professional. You could say:

"So, what do you do if you are at risk? See your health care professional. Ask 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 live healthier longer.

That's why testing is so important. The health care professional 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 professional to test your kidneys."

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

> **"Keeping your diabetes and high blood pressure under control is important. By following your health care professional's advice—whether that means taking medication, following a special diet, or being physically active—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."**

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 following up with their family health buddy at some point over the next three months to check on his or her health. Recommend they use email, 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.

Create a follow-up list of family members at risk

If your family talks openly about personal health conditions, you already may know who has 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 professional about getting tested for kidney disease.

A friendly reminder gives you and other family members a chance to express your concern, and it may be just what the family member 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.

Encourage family members who are involved in their faith communities to conduct a Kidney Sundays session. Let family members know they also can get more information about diabetes, weight control, and high blood pressure from the NIDDK. To learn more about these topics, call the NIDDK Health Information Center at 1-800-860-8747 or visit the NIDDK website.

- To learn more about diabetes, visit the Diabetes health information page.
- For more information about weight control and physical activity, visit the Weight Management health information page.
- To learn more about managing high blood pressure, call the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute (NHLBI) at 1-877-645-2448 or visit the NHLBI website.

Tips

- Hold conversations to talk about kidney health in a group setting.
- Hand out materials that people at the reunion can take home and read on their own.
- Partner with a health facility or organization to host a health screening for your family to test blood pressure, blood glucose levels, or body mass index.

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.

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 professional 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.

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.

- Visit the NIDDK website for educational materials that you can print and share with your family. You can also call 1-800-860-8747 for more information.
- Ask permission to have the conversation. Choose the right time and environment. A quiet, private place that is free from distractions is best.
- If family members are not comfortable talking about their health, don't force a discussion. Express your feelings of concern. Let them know that you'll be ready to talk whenever they are. 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 professional is theirs.
- Offer to go with them to a health care professional.

Approach 3:

Connect with Family Members by Email, 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 next page may be personalized and emailed to family members. Make your own changes based on your personal style. Copy and paste the note into the body of an email, 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 may also share information about **kidney disease** from the NIDDK.

Tip

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

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. A person with kidney failure 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 professional 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 www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/kidney-disease. Join me online and like the NIDDK on Facebook (www.facebook.com/NIDDKgov).

With Love,

[Name here]

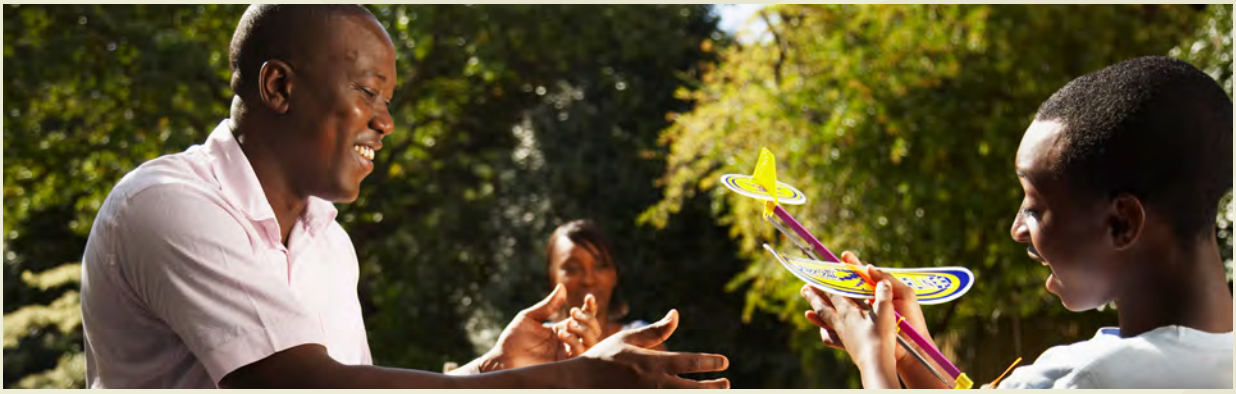
You can also send a series of text messages or quick emails to family members.

Message Family Before the Reunion

- **Hi family! Taking care of your kidneys is important. We'll be talking about kidney health at the reunion.**
- **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.**
- **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.**

Message Family After the Reunion

- **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 professional about kidney disease testing.**
- **Hi family! Be sure to maintain a healthy weight, be physically active, and reduce sodium in your diet. Ask me how.**
- **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, you can get more information about kidney disease and other health topics by calling 1 800 860 8747 or visiting the **NIDDK website.**

To complement your health conversations, you can print and distribute these materials from the NIDDK.

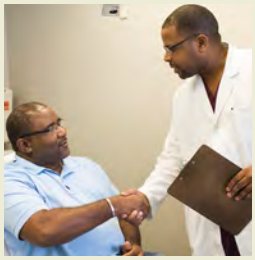
- Chronic Kidney Disease Overview
- What Is Chronic Kidney Disease?
- Preventing Chronic Kidney Disease
- Chronic Kidney Disease Tests & Diagnosis
- Weight Management
- High Blood Pressure & Kidney Disease
- Kidney Sundays Toolkit

Planning Tips

Planning Tip 1. | Create a family history health chart. Use a web-based tool for making a family health portrait.

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 the Kidneys Sundays web page to learn more.



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

Planning Tip 5. | Share food substitutions and health-conscious meal information with your family. Learn more at Eating Right for Chronic Kidney Disease.

Planning Tip 6. | Get the younger generation involved. Ask for their help to encourage older adults to adjust treasured family recipes with healthier food substitutions.

Planning Tip 7. | Inspire others. Share your family's story on the NIDDK Facebook page.

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

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