**How To Keep Your Kidneys Healthy: Nutrition, Exercise, and Screening for Kidney Disease –
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Chronic kidney disease (CKD) affects millions of people worldwide, often silently progressing over many years before noticeable symptoms appear. The good news is that CKD is preventable, and its progression can be slowed or halted with the right approach. A combination of proper nutrition, regular exercise, and routine screening can help you maintain kidney health and catch any potential issues early.

Understanding Kidney Health
The kidneys are vital organs that filter waste, excess fluids, and toxins from the blood, balance electrolytes, and help control blood pressure. Over time, CKD can lead to kidney failure, which may require dialysis or a kidney transplant. Early intervention can help avoid this outcome.

Importance of Nutrition for Kidney Health
Eating a balanced, kidney-friendly diet is one of the best ways to maintain kidney function. If you already have kidney disease, your healthcare provider may recommend dietary changes to help manage the condition. Here's how you can use nutrition to your advantage:

Key Dietary Tips:

- Limit Sodium: High sodium levels can increase blood pressure, which is a major risk factor for kidney disease. Aim for less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day (about 1 teaspoon of salt).
- Control Protein Intake: Protein is necessary for body function, but too much can strain the kidneys. Opt for moderate portions of high-quality protein sources like fish, chicken, and plant-based proteins.
- Eat Heart-Healthy Fats: Healthy fats, like those found in olive oil, avocados, and nuts, can help lower cholesterol and reduce the burden on your kidneys.
- Focus on Fruits and Vegetables: Foods rich in vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants can help reduce inflammation and support kidney function. However, some kidney conditions require limiting potassium or phosphorus, so always consult your healthcare provider about which foods are best for you.
- Stay Hydrated, but Not Excessively: Proper hydration helps the kidneys filter waste, but overhydration may put stress on already-compromised kidneys. Drinking enough water is essential but keep track of fluid intake if you have kidney problems.

Foods to Avoid:

- Processed Foods: Often high in sodium, artificial additives, and unhealthy fats.
- Sugary Beverages: Sugary drinks can increase your risk of diabetes, which is a leading cause of kidney disease.
- Excessive Red Meat: Can lead to higher levels of waste products like urea in the blood.

The Role of Exercise in Kidney Health
Physical activity is crucial for overall health and kidney function. Regular exercise helps maintain healthy blood pressure, regulate blood sugar levels, and promote good circulation. Here's how exercise benefits kidney health:

Exercise Benefits:

- Helps Control Blood Pressure: High blood pressure is one of the leading causes of kidney disease. Exercise can reduce both systolic and diastolic blood pressure levels.
- Regulates Blood Sugar: Diabetes is another major contributor to CKD. Regular exercise helps improve insulin sensitivity and keeps blood sugar levels in check.
- Prevents Obesity: Maintaining a healthy weight reduces the risk of high blood pressure, diabetes, and other conditions that strain the kidneys.
- Improves Circulation: Exercise boosts blood flow, which supports the kidneys' ability to filter waste effectively.

Exercise Recommendations:

- Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise per week (e.g., brisk walking, swimming, cycling).
- Include strength training exercises at least two days per week to build muscle and support metabolism.
- Stretching and flexibility exercises also promote overall health and help prevent injury.

Lifestyle Modifications to Prevent Kidney Disease
In addition to nutrition and exercise, there are several other lifestyle changes that can help prevent CKD:

- Quit Smoking: Smoking reduces blood flow to the kidneys and increases the risk of kidney disease.
- Limit Alcohol: Excessive alcohol intake can lead to high blood pressure and liver disease, both of which are harmful to kidney health.
- Maintain a Healthy Weight: Being overweight increases the risk of developing diabetes and high blood pressure, both of which are risk factors for kidney disease.

How to Screen for Kidney Disease
Early detection of kidney disease is essential for preventing long-term complications. Screening can identify kidney damage before symptoms appear. Here are some common tests:

Key Screening Tests for Kidney Disease:

- Blood Test (eGFR): This test measures the glomerular filtration rate (eGFR), which indicates how well the kidneys are filtering waste. An eGFR of 60 or higher is considered normal.
- Urine Test (Albumin-to-Creatinine Ratio): This test checks for protein in the urine, which can be a sign of kidney damage. A healthy kidney doesn't allow protein to leak into the urine.
- Blood Pressure Monitoring: High blood pressure is a leading cause and result of kidney disease. Regular monitoring can help detect kidney issues early.
- Kidney Ultrasound: If further investigation is needed, a kidney ultrasound can check for structural abnormalities or blockages.

Who Should Be Screened?

Regular screening is recommended for individuals at higher risk of CKD, including:

- Those with high blood pressure
- Individuals with diabetes
- People with a family history of kidney disease
- Anyone with a history of heart disease or stroke

- Individuals who are <u>overweight</u> or <u>smoke</u> regularly

Call to Action

Taking steps to maintain kidney health can greatly reduce the risk of chronic kidney disease. Focus on a balanced diet, regular exercise, and routine screening to stay on top of your kidney health. If you are at risk, early detection is key to preventing further damage. A proactive approach to kidney health is one of the best ways to ensure long-term wellness.

If you haven't already, schedule a kidney health screening with your healthcare provider today. Whether you're at risk for CKD or just want to stay ahead of potential issues, regular check-ups can help protect your kidneys and your overall health. Your kidneys do so much for your body, so it's time to return the favor and give them the care they deserve.

Dr. Charles P. Catania is the Medical Director for PentaHealth. He is Board Certified in Family Medicine and Hospice Medicine. He received his medical degree from the American University of the Caribbean School of Medicine; medically trained in England; and completed residency at Underwood Memorial Hospital in Woodbury, New Jersey, where he was named Chief Resident in 2009 and served on the New Jersey Academy of Family Physicians Board of Directors.

Dr. Catania has been in a private practice setting since 2010 and has been named "Readers' Choice Top Doc" in South Jersey Magazine in August 2013, and "Top Doc" by his peers in Mainline Today Magazine in 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022.

Dr. Catania has an interest in all facets of family medicine. He enjoys spending time and getting to know his patients on a personal level and providing care when they need it most. He loves working our walk-in hours and in our PentaHealth Today clinic on Sundays.

He treasures time with his wife and children, and he takes pride in bringing a very personal and friendly experience when caring for his patients here at PentaHealth.

Dr. Charles P. Catania