

Acute kidney injury (AKI)

Information for patients

This leaflet is designed to give you some information about acute kidney injury (AKI). Please feel free to ask your doctor or nurse if you have any further questions.

What is AKI?

AKI is when your kidneys stop working properly over a short period of time, usually a few days or weeks.

What do the kidneys do?

Most people have two kidneys that sit in the back part of the tummy. The main function of the kidneys is to remove fluid and waste products from the body by making urine. The urine passes down pipes (ureters) to the bladder. The kidneys also regulate blood pressure, produce hormones to keep bones healthy and help the body produce red blood cells.

How does the doctor know I have AKI?

The doctor will know you have AKI from your blood and urine test results. These tests may show:

- high levels of waste products in the blood
- less urine being produced than expected.

What causes AKI?

There are four reasons an AKI can happen:

1. Decreased blood flow to the kidney – for example due to infection, dehydration or blood loss.
2. Use of some medications – for example anti-inflammatories such as ibuprofen
3. Obstruction – if there is a blockage to the flow of urine out of the body, this can cause a build-up of pressure on the kidneys and damage them. You may need a scan of your kidneys to help identify this problem.
4. Primary kidney disease – rare diseases of the kidney itself that require treatment by a kidney doctor.

Your doctor will explain to you what may have caused your AKI.

How will we treat your AKI?

We will:

- Treat any infection with antibiotics.
- If you are dehydrated, we may give you extra fluid through a drip or encourage you to drink more.
- Review your medication. Drugs that can harm the kidney while you're unwell may be stopped for a few days or permanently.
- You may need a catheter (tube) inserted into the bladder to release urine, if there is a blockage or to help us monitor how much urine you are making.
- If the cause of your AKI is unclear, the kidney doctors might advise a kidney biopsy.

Will my kidneys recover?

Most AKI is self-limiting and mild. Rarely, in some severe cases of AKI, patients may need dialysis (either short or long term). Some people may need a follow up appointment with a kidney specialist. It is important to protect your kidneys for the future by following the advice below.

How can I protect my kidneys in the future?

- Ask your doctor for specific advice and which drugs to avoid.
- Seek medical advice early if you have symptoms of infection.
- Note if you start to pass less urine.
- Make sure you stay hydrated when it is hot.
- Monitor your blood pressure.
- Monitor your blood sugars if you have diabetes.
- Keep fit and healthy.
- Stop smoking.

Further information

Please ask your doctor for further information. Other useful resources include:

Kidney Care UK: www.kidneycareuk.org/about-kidney-health

London AKI Network: www.londonaki.net/patients

More information

For more information about the kidney service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website: www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/kidney-services

Your feedback

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please email: rf.communications@nhs.net

Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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