

# Returning home after acute renal failure



In the hospital, you had a kidney problem. This fact sheet explains what happened and how it can be treated. It also gives tips on how to take good care of yourself when you return home.

## What is acute renal failure?

The kidneys filter the blood. They eliminate waste products, medications and excess water through the urine. In this way, they maintain the amount of minerals in the body, the acidity of the blood, and blood pressure at normal levels.

Renal failure happens when the kidneys no longer function as they should.

There are different types of renal failure. It's called "acute" when the kidneys suddenly stop working properly within a few days.

## What are the symptoms of this disease?

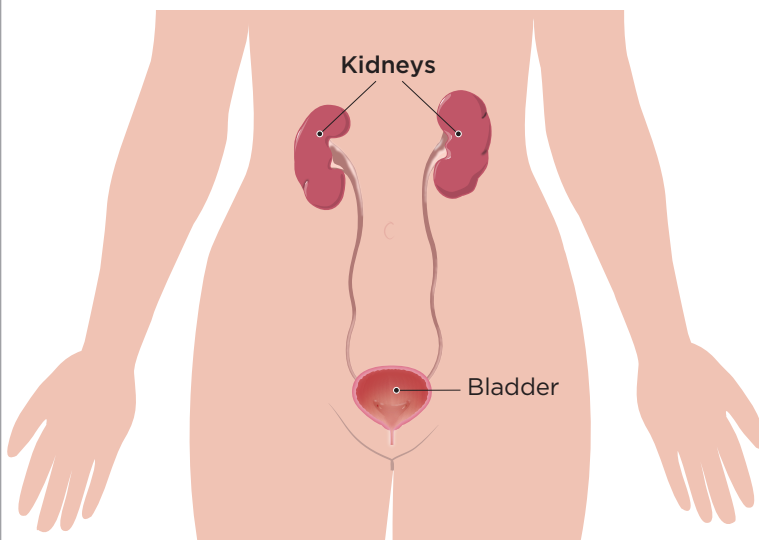
Depending on its severity, acute renal failure can cause:

- Swelling in the limbs and shortness of breath because of too much fluid in the body.
- Heart rhythm problems due to too much potassium.
- Confusion, fatigue, and heart problems due to a build-up of waste products.
- Shortness of breath and fatigue due to excess acid in the blood.

## Why do I have this disease?

The kidneys are fragile organs. During a hospital stay, several factors can cause renal failure:

- dehydration
- an infection
- heart problems
- certain major operations
- medications



## What puts me at risk for this disease?

Some health conditions put you at greater risk for acute renal failure. These include:

- already impaired kidney function (chronic renal failure)
- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- heart disease
- liver disease (cirrhosis)
- chemotherapy to treat cancer
- having only one kidney
- repeated infections

## What can be the consequences of acute renal failure?

That depends on how severe it is.

- > **Mild form.** It can disappear quickly and usually doesn't cause any long-term problems.
- > **Moderate form.** This requires a full medical evaluation. It may clear up with no long-term effects. Afterwards, a kidney specialist (nephrologist) may need to do regular follow-ups.



- > **Severe form.** This must be managed very quickly. It can cause long-term kidney malfunction (chronic renal failure). In general, it needs to be followed by the nephrologist.



## What tests did I have?

- > Blood tests show whether the kidneys are working properly by measuring the level of creatinine in the blood. A high level means the kidneys aren't **filtering as well as they should**.
- > Additional tests, such as urinalysis and imaging studies (e.g. ultrasound, CT scan), may be needed to help determine the cause and the treatment required.

## How is the disease treated?

Treatment varies depending on the cause. In general, mild and moderate forms are treated by adjusting your medication.

For severe forms, dialysis is sometimes required. Through a small tube (catheter) connected to a machine, some of your blood is pumped out of your body, filtered, and then reinjected. This machine temporarily replaces the function of your kidneys.

This helps to remove waste, balance acidity, and eliminate excess fluid.

## Can the disease be prevented?

It is very difficult to predict or prevent acute renal failure in the hospital, despite the best efforts of the care team.

However, after an acute episode, we can try to prevent chronic renal failure. This is done by stabilizing renal function with good control of risk factors (blood pressure, diabetes) and adjusting medications.

## How can I take care of myself now?

In the hospital, your care team looks after everything. But when you get home, you can take action. Follow these tips to help your kidneys recover. This can help prevent further episodes of acute failure and progression to chronic failure.

- Eat well to maintain a healthy weight.
- Don't take certain over-the-counter medications that can cause kidney damage, such as anti-inflammatory drugs (Naproxen, Aleve), ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), or celecoxib (Celebrex).
- Talk to your pharmacist and doctor about any new medications or natural products you're taking. They can tell you if it's safe for your kidneys.
- Know which medications to stop taking when you're sick (diarrhea, vomiting, dehydration): medications that make you urinate (diuretics), blood pressure medications, and diabetes medications.
- Keep your blood pressure under control: take your medication and measure your blood pressure at home.
- Take your preventive medications as directed even if you have no symptoms.
- Inform your family doctor that you've had an episode of acute renal failure.
- Tell your medical staff about your condition before undergoing any examination that uses contrast material ("dye").
- Go to all follow-up appointments after your discharge from the hospital, and make sure to go for your blood and urine tests before those appointments.



## Are there any signs I should watch for?

Renal failure is usually a "silent" disease, which is not detected until it's very advanced.

That's why it's important to have regular medical check-ups and blood tests. This helps to ensure that you maintain good renal function.

## Who do I contact if I need to cancel or reschedule an appointment or if I have questions?

For any questions related to a health concern, you can call a nurse at the CHUM Patient Health Line:

> **514 890-8086**

This service is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. When calling, make sure to have your health insurance card on hand.

If you have a problem with an appointment, you can reach the Post-Acute Renal Failure Clinic (Nephrology), Monday to Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

> **514 890-8000, ext. 32588**



### USEFUL RESOURCES

The Kidney Foundation of Canada:  
> [kidney.ca](http://kidney.ca)

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website

[chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante](http://chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante)

*The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.*

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal  
[chumontreal.qc.ca](http://chumontreal.qc.ca)



## Questions

Write down any questions you want to ask your care team so you don't forget anything.



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## Observations - Comments

Write down observations you feel are important: your symptoms, treatments, follow-up, energy level, spirit, etc.



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## Upcoming appointments

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## Resource people and contacts

Write down phone numbers, email addresses and websites that could be useful.



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