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Quick Guide to Understanding Kidney Functions by [Karl Barrett](#)

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The kidneys, of which most people have two, have several functions in addition to eliminating your body of waste products and excess fluid. The kidneys produce urine, which removes excess body fluid and waste products. Seems pretty simple, right? Well, the process by which urine is produced is actually a complex series of events necessary to keep the body's chemicals in proper balance. Proper kidney functions are extremely necessary to your overall health and well-being.

The National Kidney Foundation® provides helpful information the average person can understand. Let's take a look at some basic facts about what kidneys do and what can happen when proper kidney function is compromised. Elimination of waste products and excess fluid is just one of the many roles the kidneys have in the human body. They also regulate the body's amount of salt, acid content and potassium, and the kidneys produce hormones that affect how other organs in the body function. Hormones produced by the kidneys stimulate the production of red blood cells, keep blood pressure regulated, and aid in the control of calcium metabolism. Serious, even life-threatening, kidney problems may develop if you do not monitor the health of these vital organs.

Basic Overview of How Kidneys Work

Each of your kidneys is the size of a human fist. They are located on at the lowest edge of the rib cage on either side of the spine. Each kidney has millions of units called "nephrons," and each nephron has a glomerulus (a unit of tiny blood vessels) attached to a tubule. When blood reaches the glomerulus, it is filtered, and the remaining fluid passes along the kidney's tubules. While in the tubules, water is added or extracted according to your body's needs, and the final product is the urine we pass.

Why are kidneys so important to our health? Kidneys perform life-sustaining functions—if they don't work properly, our bodies will not be relieved of dangerous toxins. Poor kidney function can lead to:

Diabetes

Hypertension

Heart attack

Scarring of the kidneys

Inflammation of the kidneys

Urinary incontinence

Urinary tract infections (UTI)

Stroke

Polycystic kidney disease

Kidney stones

Kidney failure

Early Detection to Prevent Serious Kidney Problems

There are simple tests that can detect kidney problems before they escalate to the dangerous level. Frequent blood pressure checks will help to monitor the possibility of kidney issues. A urinalysis can also detect too much protein in the urine—“an excess amount of protein in the urine means your kidneys are not filtering properly. Testing your creatinine level in your blood can also help detect early kidney malfunction. Knowing the risk factors for kidney disease is very helpful to preventing kidney disease, so be sure to provide your physician with a thorough medical history. You may have an increased risk of kidney problems if you:

Are over the age of 50

Have diabetes

Have hypertension

Have a family history of renal problems

Are of African-American descent

Are of Hispanic descent

Are of Asian descent

Are of Pacific Islander descent

Kidney functions, especially as you age and/or have a family history of renal disease, must be carefully monitored to help prevent renal malfunction or failure. Speak to your physician about the health of your kidneys and see what preventative measures you can take now to minimize your chances of developing renal problems later.

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[Karl Barrett](#) - About Author:

Karl Barrett needed to find all the information he could on a [kidney dialysis](#) treatment and centers in his area. DaVita has the information on all kidney diseases and a [dialysis treatment options](#) and can help you with support services.

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