



Diabetes and Chronic Kidney Disease

A Guide for
American Indians
and Alaska Natives





Andy Gallegos

Andy Gallegos, a member of the Santa Ana Pueblo in New Mexico, knew something was wrong when his vision became blurry and he felt very tired. Andy went to his community clinic where a blood test showed that his blood sugar was very high, and that he had diabetes. Since then, Andy has learned that diabetes can be controlled. He tests himself with his own glucose monitor every day and takes medication. He watches what he eats, walks five miles to work and exercises. Andy is also working on losing weight and quitting smoking. "I feel my diabetes is not going to slow me down," Andy says. Now in his 40's, Andy still does a lot of work around the house and spends time on hobbies, like making and painting traditional items such as gourds and drums. "It's not shameful to have diabetes," Andy says, "it's better to get help early while it's easier to prevent the effects of diabetes."



Why do I need to learn about diabetes and chronic kidney disease?

Diabetes is the number one cause of chronic kidney disease and other serious health problems like heart disease, eye disease and nerve damage. One out of five American Indians and Alaska Natives has diabetes, compared with one of 20 adults in the total U.S. population.

Chronic kidney disease can lead to total kidney failure, which can cause death—unless it is treated with dialysis or a kidney transplant. American Indians and Alaska Natives develop kidney failure three times more often than white people because of diabetes. Diabetes causes more than half of the cases of kidney failure in American Indians.

Can diabetes be prevented?

Yes. The best way to fight diabetes is by preventing it. The most common form of diabetes in American Indians and Alaska Natives is Type 2 diabetes. This type of diabetes usually occurs in adults over 45, but it is becoming more common in younger people. Research shows that you can help prevent Type 2 diabetes if you:

- Keep your weight at a healthy level
- Follow a diet that is high in fiber and low in fat and simple sugars. This means

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Patricia Burr and her fiancé, Ken

Patricia Burr, a member of the Stockbridge-Munsee branch of the Mohican tribe, found out she had Type 2 diabetes about 15 years ago at age 24. Although she had a family history of Type 2 diabetes and had symptoms like fatigue, constant thirst and frequent urination, she thought she was too young to have Type 2 diabetes, which usually occurs in adults over 45. “Back then, Type 2 diabetes was rare in someone that young,” she says, “but today, it is becoming much more common in younger people.” At the Menominee Tribal Clinic in Keshena, Wisconsin, where Patricia now works as a nurse and diabetes educator, they start screening people at high school age or even earlier if they are overweight or have a family history of diabetes. “The best way to prevent serious health problems if you have diabetes is to be diagnosed and treated early.”



eating lots of fruits and vegetables, lean meats like chicken or turkey without skin, fish, and whole grains. It means limiting how much fried foods, whole milk and cheese, fatty meats, soda pop, and sweets you eat or drink. Talk to your doctor, dietitian or health educator for more information.

- Get plenty of exercise. Most people need to exercise 30 minutes a day. This includes activities like walking, biking, swimming or dancing. Be sure to check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.

What if I already have diabetes?

If you have diabetes, it's important to visit your doctor or clinic regularly and follow the treatment they recommend for you. You may need to do some or all of the following to treat your diabetes:

- Go to your doctor or clinic every month for checkups.
- Check your blood sugar every day.
- Follow a special diet for diabetes.
- Take your diabetes pills or shots to control your blood sugar.
- Stop smoking, if you are a smoker.
- Avoid alcohol.
- Seek help to deal with stress and emotional problems.



If you follow your treatment program and keep your blood sugar controlled, you can help to prevent other serious health problems.

What are the signs that diabetes has damaged my kidneys?

The earliest sign is albumin (a type of protein) in your urine. Other signs are:

- High blood pressure
- Swelling in your ankles and legs
- Needing to urinate more often, especially waking up to go to the bathroom.

Your urine and blood pressure will be checked when you visit your doctor or clinic. A simple urine test can detect albumin in your urine. In addition, a simple blood test should be done to estimate your glomerular filtration rate (GFR), which tells how well your kidneys are working to remove wastes from your body. **Make sure to ask about your results and to keep track of them.**

What can I do if I have chronic kidney disease?

If diabetes has already damaged your kidneys, the following steps may help to prevent your kidney disease from getting worse:



- Visit your doctor or clinic as often as your doctor recommends.
- Keep your diabetes under control by taking your diabetes pills or insulin shots and following a healthy diet every day.
- Don't take pain-relieving medications without first checking with your doctor or clinic.
- If you have high blood pressure, follow your doctor's orders for reducing your blood pressure.
- Speak to other members of your family. They may also have an increased chance of getting chronic kidney disease.

What if I have diabetes and high blood pressure?

If you have diabetes, your chance of developing chronic kidney disease will be greater if you also have high blood pressure. If your blood pressure is high, it is very important to keep it under control. To control your blood pressure, you may need to:

- Take high blood pressure pills. Your doctor may prescribe a special type of high blood pressure medication called an angiotensin converting (ACE) inhibitor or an angiotensin II receptor blocker (ARB). Studies show that these medications help to protect your kidneys.
- Limit the amount of salt in your diet
- Take a water pill, to get rid of excess fluid in your body

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Priscilla Archuleta

Pricilla Archuleta, a member of the Zuni tribe in New Mexico, works full-time as a nursing assistant at the Zuni PHS Indian Hospital and takes care of her mother when she's not working. Priscilla's life is not that unusual except that she and her mother are both hemodialysis patients as a result of having Type 2 diabetes. Priscilla has a very practical attitude about her life as a kidney patient stating that: "It has a lot of ups and downs, but that's life." When she learned she had kidney failure, she didn't accept it sitting down. She started taking better care of herself, which included joining an exercise program at the Zuni Wellness Center. With two grown children and grandchildren, Priscilla has a lot to live for. She is especially proud of her daughter who just finished college and started work at a hospital in Utah. Priscilla finds it a definite plus to be able to receive her treatments in her own community, where the staff and patients are mostly other tribal members.



- Make sure your blood pressure is checked at every visit to your doctor or clinic
- Follow a healthy meal plan and get enough exercise
- Stop smoking, if you are a smoker
- Avoid alcohol
- Tell your doctor about any side effects from your high blood pressure pills. Your doctor may be able to switch you to another medication that works better for you. In the meantime, do not stop taking your high blood pressure pills.

What happens if my kidneys stop working?

The job of your kidneys is to clear wastes out of your blood. Kidney failure means that your kidneys stop working, and these wastes build up to high levels in your blood. This can make you very sick and, without treatment, will cause death. The good news is that kidney failure can be treated very successfully with dialysis or a kidney transplant.

What is dialysis?

Dialysis is a treatment that filters wastes out of your blood. Two types of dialysis are available—hemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis. Dialysis treatments can be done at a dialysis center or at home.



What is a kidney transplant?

A kidney transplant is an operation to place a healthy kidney into your body. The kidney transplant may come from a living donor or from someone who died and donated a kidney. A living donor may be a close relative, spouse, or friend of yours, or even a stranger who wished to donate a kidney to anyone in need of a transplant. For more information about dialysis and kidney transplants, see the National Kidney Foundation booklets listed below.

- *Diabetes and Kidney Disease*
- *High Blood Pressure and Your Kidneys*
- *Early Warning Signs of Kidney and Urinary Tract Disease*
- *About Chronic Kidney Disease: A Guide for Patients and their Families*
- *Are You at Increased Risk for Chronic Kidney Disease?*
- *Nutrition and Chronic Kidney Disease*
- *Choosing a Treatment for Kidney Failure*



Members of the diabetes support group at the Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico help each other practice diabetes control daily. From left to right: Clara Cajete, Jolene Gutierrez, Ann Taliman and Patsy Boyd.



- *What You Need to Know About Hemodialysis*
- *What You Need to Know About Peritoneal Dialysis*
- *Kidney Transplant: A New Lease on Life*
- *What You Need to Know About Urinalysis*

Know the Symptoms of Diabetes

See your doctor if you:

- feel tired all the time
- feel hungry all the time
- feel thirsty all the time
- lose weight suddenly
- have wounds or sores that don't heal well
- need to urinate more often
- have blurry vision
- have numbness or tingling in your hands or feet.

Remember...

Some people with diabetes have no symptoms. All American Indians and Alaska Natives are at risk for developing Type 2 diabetes, so have your blood sugar checked regularly.

In memory of Clarence Yazza of San Felipe Pueblo in New Mexico. Clarence shared his experiences with diabetes and chronic kidney disease in the first edition of this brochure.

More than 20 million Americans—one in nine adults—have chronic kidney disease, and most don't even know it. More than 20 million others are at increased risk. The National Kidney Foundation, a major voluntary health organization, seeks to prevent kidney and urinary tract diseases, improve the health and well-being of individuals and families affected by these diseases, and increase the availability of all organs for transplantation. Through its 51 affiliates nationwide, the foundation conducts programs in research, professional education, patient and community services, public education and organ donation. The work of the National Kidney Foundation is funded by public donations.

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