

A photograph of a person from the back, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt and shorts. They are holding both hands on their lower back, indicating pain or discomfort. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a vase on a table.

Lupus & the Kidneys

Lupus affects different people in different ways. Many people with lupus have problems with their kidneys.

How Does Lupus Affect the Kidneys?

Your kidneys filter waste and extra water out of your blood to make urine (pee). They also help control your blood pressure and keep the right balance of salts, acids, and minerals in your blood.

Lupus can cause a kidney disease called **lupus nephritis**. Lupus nephritis is inflammation in the kidneys that can make them stop working. When the kidneys aren't working well, waste builds up in the blood and extra water builds up in the body.

What are the symptoms of lupus nephritis?

In the early stages of lupus nephritis, you might not notice any symptoms. As the disease gets worse, it can cause the following symptoms:

- **Swelling** (usually in the feet, ankles, legs, or face)
- **Foamy urine** (pee)
- **Peeing more often than usual**, especially at night
- **High blood pressure**

Other problems in the urinary system

In addition to lupus nephritis, lupus and lupus treatments can increase your risk for other problems in the urinary system (the system that makes pee), like **urinary tract infections (UTIs)**.

Your doctor can do tests to find out whether problems in your urinary system are caused by lupus or by a medicine you're taking to treat lupus.

What's inflammation?

Inflammation usually happens when your immune system is fighting an infection or an injury. But lupus makes your immune system attack healthy tissue instead, and that can cause inflammation in lots of different body parts. Swelling is a common symptom of kidney inflammation.

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Keep in mind that any medicine you take for lupus can have side effects. Talk with your doctors about what changes to watch for with the medicines you're taking. And tell your treatment team right away if you have any side effects.

Find Out If You Have Lupus Nephritis

Since lupus nephritis may not cause symptoms at first, it's important that people with lupus get tested for kidney problems. A special doctor called a nephrologist can find out if you have lupus nephritis or other problems in your urinary system.

You may need different kinds of tests, including:

- **Urine tests** to check for blood and protein in your urine
- **Blood tests** to check how well your kidneys are filtering waste out of your blood
- **Kidney biopsy** to check for inflammation and scarring in your kidney tissue

Find the Right Treatment Plan

Kidney problems can be serious, but there are many medicines that can treat them. Your doctors can help you find a treatment plan that works for you.

If your kidney problems cause kidney failure, you'll need a treatment called **dialysis**. Dialysis uses a machine to filter waste and extra water out of the blood. You may also need a kidney transplant to replace your kidneys.

Eat healthy

Making healthy food and beverage choices can help protect your kidneys and manage the symptoms of lupus nephritis and other kidney problems.

Try these steps:

- **Eat less sodium** (salt) to help control your blood pressure and reduce swelling
- **Eat smaller portions of protein foods**, like meat and dairy
- **Cut back on foods with saturated fats**
- If you drink alcohol, **drink only in moderation**

If you have severe kidney problems, you may also need to limit the amount of fluid you drink or the amount of certain minerals in the foods you eat. Work with your doctors to make a plan that's right for you.

Regular use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), like ibuprofen, can cause kidney damage. If you have kidney problems, talk with your doctor about ways to treat your lupus-related inflammation without using NSAIDs.

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**Resource Center
on Lupus** ■

by Lupus Foundation of America

For more information about lupus, please visit the
National Resource Center on Lupus at:

Lupus.org/Resources