

# Be supported by your health care team

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**M**anaging chronic kidney disease (CKD) may sometimes feel like a big job. Luckily, you don't have to do it alone. Your health care team is there to help you step by step.

Knowing who's on your care team and what they do is important. We'll explain who's on your health care team and what they do so you can find the support you need.

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## **You and your family or friends**

You and the people who care about you are the most important members of the team. Your wishes and preferences are important, along with the support of your family and friends. By asking questions and following your treatment plan, you and your health care team can work together to manage your kidney disease and help you live your best life.

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## **Primary care provider**

If you're in the early stages of kidney disease, a primary care provider (PCP) may monitor your kidney health during regular visits. Your PCP can also help you manage other conditions that can complicate kidney disease, such as diabetes and high blood pressure. They can also refer you to a nephrologist, a doctor that specializes in kidney health, or other types of specialists.

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## **Nephrologist**

This is a doctor who has specialized, advanced training in caring for people with kidney disease. Nephrologists monitor the health of your kidneys and prescribe medications to help you manage CKD. These doctors help you make decisions about treatments, such as dialysis or a kidney transplant. Nephrologists also supervise care at dialysis centers and provide long-term care for people who have a kidney transplant.

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## **Nephrology nurses**

These are registered nurses who specialize in caring for people with kidney disease. These nurses help coordinate your overall care and treatment. They're also skilled at explaining how to care for yourself and stay as healthy as possible.

Nephrology nurses also oversee the people who deliver care in dialysis centers. Some have special training, so they can teach people how to do dialysis at home.

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### **Nurse practitioners and physician assistants**

These team members work with PCPs and nephrologists to provide care. As with nephrology nurses, you can always turn to nurse practitioners and physician assistants if you have questions about how to care for yourself and stay as healthy as possible.

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### **Renal dietitians**

This health care professional has highly specialized training in nutrition and diet. Renal dietitians know which foods and nutrients are healthiest for people with kidney disease. They will work closely with you to develop a meal plan that is tasty and manageable. The meal plan will be based on how well your kidneys are working, whether or not you do dialysis and if you have other conditions, such as high blood pressure or diabetes.

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### **Social worker**

Kidney disease can cause life changes and strong emotions. A social worker can make the journey easier. Most nephrology social workers have advanced degrees in clinical social work. They offer counseling to patients and their families, find ways to improve quality of life, and seek out local, state and federal services that are available to people with CKD.

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### **Patient care technicians**

If you choose to do in-center dialysis, these are the team members you will see most often. They typically start each treatment and monitor you during and after each treatment.

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