

Next Steps Following a Diagnosis of Chronic Kidney Disease: The Patient's Guide

Receiving a new diagnosis of chronic kidney disease (CKD) can be overwhelming for patients, family, friends, and care partners. Healthmap Solutions is here to help.

The tests have been done, the results are in, and the conclusion is unequivocal. **"You have kidney disease."**

Sometimes, the diagnosis comes out of the blue, delivered to a patient who is in an emergency setting following a fall in their home. In other cases, it may be the predicted outcome following years of treatment for other chronic conditions such as hypertension and diabetes. No matter how or when the diagnosis is delivered, it represents a profound change in a person's life. Thankfully, it's still possible to have a long, healthy life while living with CKD, provided the patient takes steps to manage their disease.

At Healthmap Solutions, we believe that early detection is key to successful CKD management, as is taking immediate steps to slow disease progression. In this article, we provide a guide for patients newly diagnosed with CKD to ensure they are equipped to manage their disease and slow its progression, using input from our Chief Medical Officer, **Howard Shaps, MD, MBA** and our Corporate Medical Director and nephrologist, **Stephanie Toth-Manikowski, MD, MHS**. Healthcare providers treating newly diagnosed patients with CKD can also use this guide to offer support and recommendations to their patients at this important time in their health journey.

Let's say you've been diagnosed with **Stage 3 CKD**. What should you do immediately following this diagnosis?

The Patient's Guide to Managing A New CKD Diagnosis

SPEAK WITH YOUR DOCTOR. The first thing to do is learn what chronic kidney disease is, why you have it, what your CKD stage means, and how it will affect you. Your doctor will explain what caused your CKD and what can be done to slow its progression. Above all, understand that CKD can be managed.

MEET WITH YOUR NEPHROLOGIST. Your PCP will likely refer you to a nephrologist, a specialist in kidney healthcare and disease management. The nephrologist will work with your PCP in a coordinated effort to slow your CKD progression and preserve natural kidney function.

ACTIVELY SELF-MONITOR YOUR HEALTH MARKERS. If you aren't doing so already, start checking your blood sugars regularly if you have diabetes. If you have high blood pressure, check that regularly, too. Learn what the numbers represent, what your "goal numbers" should be, and how they relate to your kidney disease and overall health.

"I think it's important to be aware of your blood pressure," Dr. Toth-Manikowski said. **"Hypertension is a silent disease. You don't know if you have high blood pressure if you're not checking it."** Often, the blood pressure readings a patient obtains at the pharmacy or at home, when taken two or three times a week, provide a better basis for making decisions than a blood pressure reading taken every three months in the doctor's office."

Regarding diet, Dr. Toth-Manikowski said, "My recommendation to the average CKD stage 3 patient with diabetes is to eat healthy but also comply with your established diabetes diet. **Someone with high blood pressure should be on the [DASH Diet](#),¹ and ideally consume no more than 2.5 grams of salt per day."**

(For more on kidney-friendly diets, check out our article ["Diet and Kidney Disease Management."](#))²

ACCEPT THE CHANGES. One of the most significant topics you'll discuss is lifestyle modification, particularly regarding healthier eating and weight loss.

"The reason weight loss is important for people with CKD who are overweight or obese, is that the excess weight strains the kidneys,"

Dr. Toth-Manikowski said. "So the more a person weighs, the more strain experienced by the kidneys. **Losing weight not only helps preserve kidney function, it also helps reduce blood pressure."**

"Smoking is another one," she continued. **"Smoking contributes to atherosclerosis or calcification of the arteries."** That negatively affects the vasculature of the kidneys as well.

"Try to find ways to exercise. You don't have to have a goal of running a marathon, but if you are currently sedentary, maybe make the goal for that week to get up and get out a couple of times. It doesn't have to be an hour-long walk. Just up and down the block, or even just to the mailbox and back.

"If you're smoking, work on cutting down with the eventual aim of quitting." Ask your PCP about any medications or other treatments that can help you quit. Smoking leads to cardiovascular disease, which is a major contributor to CKD."

"I would add compliance with medications, as well," said Dr. Shaps. **"It's important to take the medications prescribed—they won't work if you don't take them."** That in turn means making sure you have them on hand. Don't wait till you run out to get your meds refilled. Like everything we've talked about, it isn't easy, but it will help your life."

BECOME A STUDENT OF YOUR CKD. It's a complex subject, but it's important to understand. Knowledge is power, and the more you know about CKD, the better you will be able to understand and adhere to your care team's recommendations.

Start by reading the information your PCP and nephrologist provide and watching the videos they recommend. Check out the many trustworthy, yet patient-friendly websites developed by such respected organizations as:

- [The National Kidney Foundation](#)
- [The American Kidney Fund](#)
- [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases](#)
- [The Mayo Clinic](#)

A cautionary note: Be wary of opportunities for misinformation.

“There are plenty of kidney disease-related blogs, websites, and social media channels out there, run by people with limited medical knowledge, which may be well-intentioned but could be harmful, even dangerous,” Dr. Shaps said. **“My advice is to stick with credible sources, and if in doubt, always ask someone on your care team. The easiest to reach is likely your Healthmap Care Navigator.”**

FOCUS ON THE BEST OUTCOME. Understand that a CKD diagnosis is simply another stage in your life’s journey, and it’s one you won’t be taking alone.

“If we get ahead of this, get the patient on the right medications, and work together to make healthy changes, then this is a disease that can be slowed,” said Dr. Toth-Manikowski. “We can’t go back in time and reverse the disease, but we can slow it as much as possible and help patients live a close-to-normal life.”

Healthmap and the Next Steps

“We try to supplement the work the physician is doing in the clinic, whether that’s the PCP or the nephrologist,” Dr. Toth-Manikowski explained. “As a kidney population health management company, one of the things Healthmap does in our Kidney Health Management program is that we don’t just focus on CKD. **Through our Care Navigators, who are experienced nurses, we can look at the whole patient, including all of their comorbidities.**”

“I like to use the word ‘stickiness,’” Dr. Shaps said. “Our Care Navigators develop unique relationships with their patients, which can help those newly diagnosed patients navigate the healthcare system. They can help from a care coordination standpoint, help identify barriers to meeting certain goals, and in general, just be there to support the patient. One of the great attributes of the KHM program is that as long as they’re eligible for the program, patients have access to the Care Navigator.

“So if the patient has questions about their diabetes, hypertension, medications, or lifestyle choices, we can answer their question and/or provide direction. If we identify a mental health need, we can support that, too,” Dr. Shaps Said. “Because in the end, all of that is going to help the person stay in the fight to slow CKD progression.”

That’s the goal for all of us at Healthmap. By working together with providers to offer a dependable support system for patients, we can slow their disease progression, and ultimately give them the opportunity to achieve improved health outcomes and a better quality of life.

¹ www.DashDiet.org

² “Diet and Kidney Disease Management” <https://news.healthmapsolutions.com/blog/diet-and-kidney-disease-management>

ABOUT HEALTHMAP SOLUTIONS

Healthmap Solutions is an NCQA-accredited kidney population health management company serving health plans, health systems, accountable care organizations (ACOs), and provider groups seeking a value-based solution to improve the lives of millions of Americans living with kidney disease. Using its advanced technology, predictive analytics, and clinical expertise, Healthmap emphasizes early identification of patients with kidney disease and recommends clinically proven interventions to delay or slow disease progression. Healthmap's Care Navigation team works with patients and a full spectrum of providers (primary care, nephrologists, cardiologists, endocrinologists, and dialysis providers), to deliver personalized whole-person care. Healthmap's approach is to proactively plan care transitions and optimize renal replacement therapy, with a focus on in-home dialysis treatment and transplant. This approach results in improved care, outcomes, and experience for the person living with kidney disease, while lowering total medical costs for health plans and provider groups.

For more information on the Healthmap Kidney Population Health Management program, please visit www.healthmapsolutions.com



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