



# Sexual Health and Contraception when you have Chronic Kidney Disease

Patient Information



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Chronic kidney disease (CKD) can affect lots of different aspects of your life, including your sexual health. This leaflet describes some of the issues you may face in regards to your sex life and how they can be addressed. It is aimed at both men and women.



## How can CKD affect my sexual health?

When you have CKD, your immune system (which helps your body fight infection) may not work as well as normal. You may get more coughs and colds and may not respond as well to vaccinations. You are also at increased risk of infection if you take drugs that suppress the immune system to treat your kidney disease or to prevent the rejection of a kidney transplant. This includes an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as gonorrhoea, syphilis, chlamydia and HIV.

## How can I stay safe?

**As part of your normal sex life it is sensible to be screened for STIs between relationships or sexual partners.** Before having unprotected sex with a new partner, make sure you know that both you and they have been screened so you know you are not at risk. The only exception would be where neither you nor your partner have had any sexual contact before, but remember that both oral sex and intimate touching can lead to infection.

The only effective method of preventing STIs yourself is using a barrier contraception in the form of condoms, the female condom or a dam (mouth guard) for oral sex. These are available for free at sexual health clinics or from pharmacies.





## What happens if I get an STI?

**Talk to your GP or kidney doctor if you think you have an STI.** They can test you and discuss treatment options that do not interfere with your kidney medicines. You can also visit a walk-in sexual health clinic. You should tell whoever you see that you have chronic kidney disease as it could affect the treatment you are offered.

## What else can I do to protect myself?

**The Human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine is offered to all women between the ages of 12-18 in the UK.** It helps to prevent certain types of cervical cancer and is designed to be given before girls become sexually active. The first dose is usually given at age 12-13 and the second at least 6 months later. It is free to all women under 18 years old. Talk to your GP if you have not received the vaccine and would like to do so.

If you are between the ages of 25 – 65 it is very important that you attend all your smear test appointments. Between the ages of 25 - 49 you will be called for a smear test every three years. From 50 – 64 this will be every five years. You should always see your GP or a sexual health clinic if you have any change in your periods, altered discharge, bleeding between periods or bleeding after going through the menopause.



## Can I get pregnant with CKD?

CKD can affect your fertility but it is still very important to use contraception as women can still get pregnant at all stages of CKD, including on dialysis. There are some CKD medicines which have to be stopped before getting pregnant because they could harm your baby. It is therefore important to check with your doctor before you try to get pregnant.

**Do not stop taking your medications without taking medical advice.**



## What type of contraception should I use?

Talk to your GP or kidney doctor about what type of contraception might suit you best as there several different choices.

### Barrier methods

such as condoms are safe to use as contraceptives. The intrauterine device (IUD or coil) has also been shown to be safe in patients with CKD.

### Sterilisation

(hysterectomy or vasectomy) are permanent forms of contraception. They both involve an operation. A hysterectomy (removal of the female reproductive organs) is irreversible and a vasectomy cannot easily be reversed. These options should therefore only be used if you are certain that you have completed your family.

### Contraceptive pills

such as Loestrin and Microgynon which have low levels of oestrogen, may be suitable if you have CKD. You will need to have your blood pressure checked every three months as this type of pill can sometimes cause hypertension (high blood pressure) These checks can also reduce the risk of developing blood clots.

### Progesterone only contraceptives

are safe and effective, even in women with high blood pressure. You can take these as pills (the 'mini-pill'), injections every three months, implants or an intrauterine device ('Mirena coil'). Talk to your GP about these options. Like every medication they can have side effects, but can also be safe and effective forms of contraception. Women with late stage CKD or on dialysis are advised to avoid the injection as it can be associated with bone thinning and fractures, a side effect which is not seen with the pill, implant or Mirena coil.


## Where can I find out more information?

- NHS Choices : Contraception Guide:  
[www.nhs.uk/conditions/contraception/contraception-clinic-services](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/contraception/contraception-clinic-services)
- NHS Choices: Chronic Kidney Disease:  
[www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-disease/living-with](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-disease/living-with)
- Kidney Care UK – Pregnancy and CKD: [www.kidneycareuk.org/documents/182/Pregnancy\\_and\\_Chronic\\_Kidney\\_Disease.pdf](http://www.kidneycareuk.org/documents/182/Pregnancy_and_Chronic_Kidney_Disease.pdf)



 [www.kidneycareuk.org](http://www.kidneycareuk.org)

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 [www.renal.org](http://www.renal.org)

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