

# Kidney Cysts

## *What You Should Know*



As a person ages, sacs filled with fluid, called cysts, can form in the kidneys. There are five different categories of renal cyst. The majority are class I (simple cyst) and class II (minimally complex). These types of cysts are almost always non-cancerous. Complex cysts can be associated with cancer and will need to be either followed or treated. Usually, kidney cysts don't cause any symptoms and people don't know they have them. In rare cases, kidney cysts can become large enough to cause problems. If you have symptoms from kidney cysts, or complex cysts, your doctor will refer you to a urologist to discuss treatment options.

There are some diseases that cause kidney cysts. These include an inherited disease called polycystic kidney disease (PKD) and a disease called acquired cystic kidney disease (ACKD) that can develop in people with chronic kidney disease, most commonly in people on dialysis.

### What are Simple Kidney Cysts?

Simple kidney cysts are fluid-filled round or oval sacs that form in the kidneys. They are usually small, with watery fluid in them. Some people have one cyst, while others have many. Cysts can be found in one kidney or both kidneys. The sacs can range in size from a pea to a softball. These cysts are generally harmless. They do not enlarge the kidneys or affect their function.

Simple kidney cysts are more common in people over 50. They are more common in men than in women. It is not known what causes the cysts. They are not preventable.

### What are the Symptoms of Kidney Cysts?

Kidney cysts don't usually cause symptoms unless they are very large or become infected. If they do cause symptoms, these can include:

- pain on your side between the ribs and the hip
- pain in the stomach or back
- fever
- blood in the urine or dark urine

### How are Kidney Cysts Diagnosed and Treated?

Kidney cysts are usually found when a person has an imaging test (such as an ultrasound, CT scan or MRI) for another reason. If you are found to have a simple or minimally complex kidney cyst and it isn't causing problems, your doctor will likely tell you that you don't need more testing or treatment. In some cases, your doctor may want to check the cyst again with another imaging study in six months.

If your cysts are causing symptoms, your doctor may drain them with a procedure called aspiration. The doctor uses ultrasound as a guide to insert a long needle through the skin and into the cyst. The doctor drains the cyst to remove all of the fluid; sometimes medication is injected into the cyst which can harden the inside of the cyst so it is less likely to fill up with fluid again.

Larger cysts that are causing symptoms may be treated with laparoscopic surgery. The outer layer of the cyst is removed so that it cannot fill with fluid.

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### What is Polycystic Kidney Disease?

Polycystic kidney disease (PKD) is an inherited disease that causes many cysts to grow in the kidneys. This can enlarge the kidneys and affect their function. PKD can cause:

- high blood pressure
- pain in the back and side
- blood in the urine
- frequent kidney infections

Some people with the most common type of PKD end up with kidney failure. PKD can also cause cysts in the liver and other parts of the body.

There is no cure for PKD, but treatments can help with symptoms and complications. Treatments can include medicines and lifestyle changes. Kidney failure is treated with dialysis or a kidney transplant.

### What is Acquired Cystic Kidney Disease (ACKD)?

Acquired cystic kidney disease (ACKD) can develop in people who have chronic kidney disease, especially those who are on dialysis. In people with ACKD, the kidneys are normal sized, and cysts do not form in other parts of the body. This type of kidney cyst often causes no symptoms. Usually ACKD cysts do not need to be treated. If they cause complications, they can be treated with medicines, draining the cysts or surgery.

### About the Urology Care Foundation

The Urology Care Foundation is the world's leading urologic foundation – and the official foundation of the American Urological Association. We provide information for those actively managing their urologic health and those ready to make health changes. Our information is based on the American Urological Association resources and is reviewed by medical experts. To learn more, visit the Urology Care Foundation's website, **UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions** or go to **UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist** to find a doctor near you.

### Disclaimer

This information is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for professional medical advice. It is not to be used or relied on for that purpose. Please talk to your urologist or healthcare provider about your health concerns. Always consult a health care provider before you start or stop any treatments, including medications. For more information, visit **UrologyHealth.org/Download** or call 800-828-7866.