

**Kidney health: Acute kidney injury and the Sick Day Rules
Patient FAQ**

Why is it important to keep your kidneys healthy?

The kidneys are two bean-shaped organs that sit toward your lower back. They have lots of functions, but the main ones are to remove waste from your blood, balance body fluids, and create urine. If your kidneys are not working properly, toxins build up in your blood that can make you very sick. If your kidneys get damaged, you can develop chronic kidney disease, which means your kidneys slowly stop working. The final stage of this is kidney failure, meaning your kidneys no longer work at all. People with kidney failure need to have regular dialysis or a kidney transplant to survive.

The best way to keep your kidneys healthy is to drink enough water, which your kidneys need to turn into urine and get rid of toxins. It is important to get any infection of the kidneys treated straight away to prevent lasting damage. And if you are taking certain medicines, you need to stop taking them if you experience vomiting, diarrhoea or a fever.

What is acute kidney injury?

Acute kidney injury (AKI) is sudden damage to the kidneys that causes them to not work properly. This can occur when an infection takes hold, following a period of illness (e.g. diarrhoea, vomiting or fever) that results in severe dehydration. If the infection is not treated quickly it can cause actual injury to your kidneys, which can lead to permanent damage. In the very worst cases, you could end up needing dialysis or a kidney transplant.

It's essential that AKI is detected early and treated quickly to prevent permanent damage to the kidneys.

For more information on AKI, including symptoms, causes, treatment and prevention, visit the [NHS Choices](#) website.

What are the Sick Day Rules?

If you experience vomiting, diarrhoea or a fever while taking certain medicines, you run the risk of becoming severely dehydrated. When this happens, you become at risk of getting AKI mainly due to a decrease in blood flow to your kidneys, or even a kidney infection. These infections are at best very painful and need a course of antibiotics to clear up. At worst, an infection can take hold and cause actual injury to your kidneys, which could lead to AKI or permanent damage. In the very worst cases, you could end up needing dialysis or a kidney transplant.

It's really easy to prevent this from happening. All you need to do is stop taking any affected medicine while you are experiencing symptoms, and start back up when you feel better. We call this the "Sick Day Rules" – it's just one simple bit of advice to remember, and it could save you from developing a really unpleasant illness.

Which medicines pose a risk of AKI?

To help protect your kidneys, it is important to stop taking the below medicines if you experience vomiting, diarrhoea or a fever:

- Non-steroid anti-inflammatory drugs, including Nurofen (ibuprofen)
- Blood pressure lowering drugs (sometimes called ACE inhibitors or ARBs)
- Diuretics (normally known as "water tablets")
- Diabetes drugs including Metformin and Sulfonylurea

- Trimethoprim (antibiotic used to treat bacterial infections).

These medicines can be known by a number of different brand names, so please ask your GP, nurse or pharmacist whether your medicine falls into any of these categories.

Only the medicines named should be stopped on a sick day, and it is important to always start taking them again when your symptoms have cleared up.

What symptoms should you look out for?

Vomiting, diarrhoea, and fever.

You should only stop taking your medicine if you have one or more of the above symptoms. You do not need to stop your medicine for any other illness, such as a cough or cold. As soon as your symptoms stop, you can start taking your medicine again as normal. If you are unsure, ask your local pharmacist.

How long should you remain off your medicines?

You only need to stop taking your medicine for the duration of your illness (vomiting, diarrhoea or fever). As soon as your symptoms stop, you can start taking your medicine again as normal. Remember that you have been prescribed your medicine to manage a particular medical condition, so you must start taking it again as soon as you feel better.