

LIFESTYLE AND GN

Glomerulonephritis

Many adults and children with GN can lead normal lives. However, GN can affect you or your child's nutrition, mood, ability to go to work or school, or even have a pregnancy. Your healthcare team will help you manage these lifestyle factors to help you stay as healthy as possible.

Nutrition

When you get sick with another illness

Work and school

Mental health

Pregnancy

Nutrition

Making lifestyle changes, including what you eat, is an important part of GN treatment for adults and children. Taking these steps can help prevent more damage to your kidneys and help with your symptoms.

Follow a low-salt (sodium) diet to help manage high blood pressure and extra fluid in the body.

- Read food labels to choose foods that are lower in salt
- Cook and eat food without adding salt
- Choose fresh, unprocessed, and homemade foods
- Flavour your food with herbs, spices, garlic, onion, lemon juice, vinegar, and salt-free seasonings

Ensure adequate hydration.

- Drink 8 cups (2 litres) of fluid a day unless your healthcare team tells you to drink another amount. At least half of these fluids should be water
- Contact your healthcare team if you gain weight suddenly, because this could be a sign of fluid retention

Talk to your doctor or dietitian about how much protein to eat.

- People need different amounts of protein based on body size, medicines, and how well their kidneys work (kidney function)

For people on corticosteroids (such as prednisone).

- Changes in nutrition may help manage steroid-related side effects such as weight gain, high blood sugar, and weak bones
- Talk to your healthcare provider about healthy eating habits, exercise, and how much calcium and vitamin D is right for you

Everyone is different, so your or your child's nutrition needs may be different than those of other people with GN or chronic kidney disease.

When you get sick with another illness

Adults and children with GN need to be very careful when they get sick with another illness—for example, a cold, flu, or stomach bug. Some illnesses can cause the body to lose too much fluid (get dehydrated). This is especially a risk if a person is throwing up, has diarrhea, and can't eat or drink normally. Being dehydrated can affect how well the kidneys work, affect blood pressure, and make some medicines unsafe.

Contact your healthcare provider if you or your child gets sick, because they may ask you to stop some medicines for a few days.

These medicines include:

- ACE (angiotensin-converting enzyme) inhibitors—to lower blood pressure (medicines that end in “pril,” like ramipril, perindopril)
- ARB (angiotensin receptor blocker)—to lower blood pressure (medicines that end in “sartan,” like candesartan, irbesartan)
- Diuretics (water pills)—to stop the body from holding too much fluid (medicines like furosemide, metolazone, spironolactone, hydrochlorothiazide, chlorthalidone)
- Calcineurin inhibitors—to help lower the immune system to reduce inflammation (medicines like cyclosporine or tacrolimus)
- Diabetes medicines you take by mouth—to help manage your blood sugar (medicines like metformin, glyburide, canagliflozin, or other SGLT-2 inhibitors)

If you or your child gets very sick and you can't manage at home, contact your healthcare team. If you can't do this, go to your nearest emergency department.

Work and School

Many people with GN can live regular lives and do things like work, go to school, and take care of their homes and families. But when you're feeling sick, or you need treatment, you may find you need to make some changes.

This information is about how you or your child can make changes to regular activities or take time off when you need to.

Working and learning differently

Talk to your employer, principal or teacher, and family. They may not know much about kidney disease and how it affects what you can do. Talk to them about what you can do and what you need. Your healthcare provider can also join these conversations.

If you need to make changes to work or school, talk about:

- Switching to a part-time or flexible schedule
- Working remotely or learning online
- Doing work that's easier on the body

Taking time off

It may be best to take time off to rest. If you need this, ask your employer about health benefits, and ask your social worker and your pharmacist about coverage to pay

for your medicines. If you've lost income, your social worker can also tell you about financial programs and how to apply.

Going back to work or school

When you're ready, ask your healthcare provider about rehabilitation and how to prepare to go back to work or school. They will help you get ready physically and mentally so you can stay healthy.

Mental Health

GN doesn't only affect your body. It can also affect your thoughts and feelings. The following information is for both adults and children with GN that is affecting their mental health.

Having GN can bring up a lot of different feelings because you may:

- See yourself differently
- Feel moody from the medicines you take
- Be stressed
- Feel you can't control what's happening to you
- Feel lonely and isolated from family and friends (for example, because you think they won't understand your GN or you don't want them to know about it)

It's normal to have any of these feelings, or many of them at the same time:

- Shock
- Sadness
- Fear
- Anger
- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Loneliness

It's important to talk to people who care, including family, friends, and healthcare providers. They can help you or your child manage these feelings and find support groups, spiritual advisors, and healthcare providers who give mental health support.



Learn more about depression, anxiety, and physical health problems

Pregnancy

It's a good idea to talk to your kidney doctor before you get pregnant because GN can affect pregnancy and pregnancy can affect your GN. Certain medicines used to treat GN might also not be safe in pregnancy. Remember that other things can affect your pregnancy, such as your age, your general health, and whether or not you use tobacco, alcohol, or other drugs. If possible, talk to your healthcare provider about all of these things before you get pregnant.

You're more likely to have a healthy pregnancy if your GN is in remission (or well-controlled).

If your GN is more advanced and you're having symptoms, you have a higher risk of problems during pregnancy. Your healthcare provider will work with you to:

- Keep your GN symptoms stable
- Make sure you're taking the right medicines
- Manage your blood pressure.
- Determine the best timing for pregnancy

Doing these things gives you the best chance of having a healthy pregnancy.

How does GN affect pregnancy?

When you have GN and you're pregnant, you're at higher risk for pregnancy issues, such as:

- New or worse high blood pressure
- Preeclampsia (high blood pressure and damage to another organ such as kidneys, liver)
- Losing your baby before they're born (miscarriage or fetal death)

- Having your baby very early (premature baby)
- Having a very small baby.
- Cesarean section (c-section — when your baby is born through a cut in your belly)

Some types of GN (such as lupus nephritis) have more risks than others. Talk to your healthcare provider about the type of GN you have and how it can affect your pregnancy.

How does pregnancy affect GN?

Being pregnant can affect your GN and because changes in your hormones can cause your GN symptoms to get worse (flare up).

- Protein in your urine (proteinuria) may get worse
- Kidney function may get worse
- You may be at higher risk of blood clots

Your healthcare provider will be watching you closely for these problems (complications) and will work with you and your other healthcare providers to manage them.

There are medicines that treat GN problems when you're pregnant. Talk to your healthcare provider about what is right for you.

How can I prepare for pregnancy?

The best way to lower your risk of problems during pregnancy is to keep your GN and blood pressure are well-controlled before you get pregnant. This is why it is important to plan this with your healthcare team. In some cases this will require a repeat kidney biopsy, new medicines, or a referral to a specialist.

What do I do if I am pregnant?

Notify your healthcare providers immediately. They will ensure that you are on pregnancy-safe medications and ensure they follow your GN and blood pressure closely.

Your healthcare provider may give you a low dose aspirin to take at the end of your first trimester to help lower your risk of preeclampsia.

Learn more

Kidney biopsy

Kidney biopsy: Test overview

Needle biopsy of the kidney: Before your procedure

Needle biopsy of the kidney: What to expect at home

Nutrition

Potassium foods—Chronic Kidney Disease Clinical Pathway

General nutrition information for people with chronic kidney disease (not all of which apply to glomerulonephritis)



For references:
myhealth.alberta.ca/GN