

Your Journey with Kidney Stones



For more information scan this QR code or go to myhealth.alberta.ca/kidney-stone-pathway

Kidney stones are formed when substances normally found in your pee (urine) clump together. They can be different sizes and shapes. You may have pain depending on the size of the stone and where it is located in your body. You are the most important part of your healthcare team. This guide will help you to know what to expect as you work with your healthcare team to manage and treat your kidney stones. If you have any questions along the way, please ask your healthcare team. Click on the page numbers in blue if you want more information about the step in your Journey.

Before your appointment (page 5)

- Write down how you feel, and your questions, symptoms and concerns.
- Symptoms you may have with kidney stones are pain, blood in your urine, changes in how often or how much you pee, and nausea and vomiting.



Visit your healthcare provider (page 6)

- Consider bringing a family member or friend to support you.
- Share all of your symptoms and concerns. Your health includes physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and social elements.
- In order to better manage your health condition, your healthcare provider needs to hear from you and understand who you are and what matters to you.



Get your tests (page 8)

Your tests may include:

- Ultrasound
- CT Scan
- X-ray of your Kidney, Ureter and Bladder (called KUB)
- Collection of your urine (called an urinalysis)
- Bloodwork (testing for electrolytes and creatinine)



Review your test results (page 8)

- Find your test results on My Health Records or My AHS Connect (myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords).
- Talk with your healthcare provider so you know what your test results mean and how they will help your team and you decide what to do next.



Review your management & prevention options (page 10)

- For most people with kidney stones, the use of over-the-counter pain medications taken at home, and drinking lots of water, is recommended.
- For prevention, some dietary and lifestyle changes may be needed.
- Decide with your healthcare provider what will be best for you.



Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral (page 11)

- Not all patients need a referral to see a kidney stone specialist.
- A referral is determined based on the size of the kidney stone, your symptoms, where the kidney stone is located in your body, and your test results.



Start your management & watch your symptoms (page 12)

- If you have a fever or blood in your urine make sure to tell your healthcare team.
- Take an active role in your management. For example, if you have a change in symptoms or notice a new symptom consider writing down what it feels like, the date, time and what you were doing when it began.



Keep taking care of yourself (page 13)

- Keep taking care of your overall health.
- Look at other resources or supports that may support a healthy lifestyle.



Whole-person health (page 2)

Important Tips:

Need a family doctor?

www.ahs.ca/findadoctor

Need a translator?

Let your healthcare provider know

Need health advice?

Call Health Link at 811

Need to find programs and services in your community?

Call 211 or visit ab.211.ca

Whole-person health

The whole-person health approach will help you and your healthcare team better manage your health condition. It is drawn from the teachings of the medicine wheel.

Whole-person health means thinking about all parts of your health and wellness: physical, financial and social, spiritual, and emotional. All of these parts are connected and influence each other. It's important to be aware of your personal needs in each part and to share that information with your healthcare team.

- **Physical:** your specific health conditions and how well your body works
- **Financial and Social:** your ability to meet your housing, transportation, food, and health needs, feeling supported to manage your daily life, and having meaningful relationships
- **Spiritual:** your beliefs, sense of connection, and purpose
- **Emotional:** how you think, feel, and cope with life events



Whole-person health

Whole-person health also reminds us that we are all connected and work together: you, your support systems, and your healthcare providers. Your healthcare providers could be your doctor, nurse practitioner, or a team that comes together with you to plan and organize your care.

Your healthcare provider needs to understand who you are and what matters to you. This helps to build trust. But it can be hard to know what to share or what to say. Try starting by asking yourself:

“What are the things in my life that are important to me?”

“What are the things in my life that may be affecting my health and well-being?”



Continued on next page.

Bringing forward what matters to you is important. Here are some examples of things you may want to talk about with your healthcare provider:



Physical

“My symptoms are making it hard for me to do my job.”

“Because of my pain and how hard it is for me to move around, it’s hard to take care of myself.”

Financial and Social

“I’m worried I won’t be able to get to all of my appointments.”

“I need my daughter with me as a translator.”

“I’m not sure how I will pay for my medications this month.”

Spiritual

“It’s important that I follow traditional healing practices.”

“How can I include my cultures' foods and family recipes in my nutrition plan?”

“It’s important that my religious practice of fasting is respected and brought into my care.”

Emotional

“I’m lonely and have no one to talk to.”

“I have a lot of stress and I’m not sure how to manage it.”

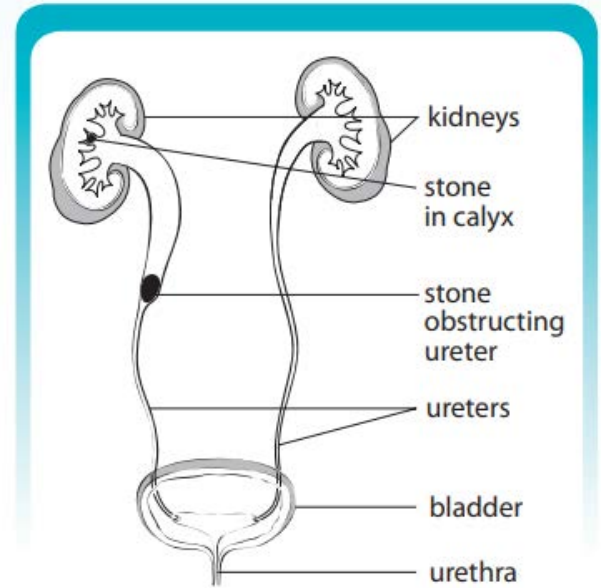
“Ever since my friend died, I’ve been struggling with my feelings.”

What are Kidney Stones?

The kidneys play an important role in helping your body get rid of substances you don't need. Kidney stones are formed when salts, minerals, and other substances clump together and don't pass in your urine.

There are different types of kidney stones. Calcium stones are the most common. Kidney stones can vary in size and can be as small as a grain of sand or as large as a marble. Kidney stones can appear in the kidneys or ureters (tubes that carry urine from the kidneys to the bladder) and they can move over time.

They may be painless while they remain in the kidney. But they may cause pain when they leave the kidney and travel through the narrow tubes (ureters) to the bladder.



Source: Canadian Urological Association
www.cua.org/system/files/PIB/PIB35_en.pdf

Before your appointment

Here are a few tips to help you get ready for your appointment with your healthcare provider:

- Use a symptom tracker to write down important information to share with your healthcare team about your symptoms.
- **Common symptoms you may have with kidney stones are:**
 - **Pain-** in your back or flank (just below the rib cage and above the waist, usually only one one side of the back). The pain may spread to the lower stomach (abdomen), groin, and genital area.
 - **Blood in the urine** (hematuria)
 - **Painful urination** (dysuria)
 - **Nausea and vomiting**
- A symptom tracker can help you remember what symptom you're feeling, when it started, how often it happens, if the symptom changes and what makes your symptoms better or worse.
- When you're done using the symptom tracker, review your list and put a mark beside the questions and concerns that are most important for you to share with your healthcare provider.
- Make a list of the prescription and non-prescription (over the counter) medicines you use, including any vitamins, lotions, herbs, and supplements.
- Ask someone you trust to go with you to your appointment. They can help you ask questions, write down instructions, and remember explanations.



Helpful tools and resources

Use a **symptom tracker**

hqca.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/HQCA-Symptom-Tracker-March-23-2022.pdf

To get the most out of your visit, plan to write notes during the visit or record the conversation using your phone's voice recorder or the Alberta Health Services My Care Conversations app (www.ahs.ca/careapp).



Healthcare provider's assessment

Pain and Symptom Assessment:

- **Why do I need this assessment?:** To understand how the kidney stone may be impacting you and the things that are important to you.
- **What should I expect?:** Your healthcare provider may ask you about your pain level. They may also ask about other symptoms such as if your urine has any blood in it, if you are peeing more or less often than usual, if it hurts to pee and if you have had any nausea or vomiting.

Fluid Intake Assessment:

- Your healthcare provider may ask how much and what kind of fluid you drink.

What should I watch for (symptoms of concern)?:

Contact your healthcare team if you:

- Develop a fever
- Have blood in urine
- Have increasing pain that is not getting better with pain medication
- Have nausea and vomiting
- Have trouble peeing or peeing more often than usual

What should I share with my healthcare provider? :

- What impact the kidney stones or pain associated with the kidney stones is having on things that are important to you, like your job, hobbies and interests, and relationships
- There are lots of things in your life that can impact your ability to manage your health, like:
 - Problems with money, housing, and access to transportation
 - Alcohol or drug use
 - Not enough support or help
 - Childhood experiences that continue to impact your adult life

Continued on next page.

What should I share with my healthcare provider? :

It's important to talk about these things with your healthcare provider because they all play a role in your health and well-being.

You are the most important part of your healthcare team.

If you don't understand what your healthcare team is telling you, let them know right away. Be open and honest. You might say:

"This is new to me. Could you please explain it slowly, using language that is easier to understand?"



"It sounded like you said that I should... Did I understand that correctly?"

"Can you show me a picture or model to help me understand?"



Helpful tools and resources

- Making the most of your appointment: <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=hw226888>
- Working with your healthcare team: hqca.ca/for-patients-%20and-families/working-with-your-%20healthcare-team/



Get your tests

Your healthcare team may ask you to provide a urine sample. The urine sample will be tested to see what the urine looks like and what might be in it. This is called a urinalysis.

You may also be asked to get blood work. Blood tests, that look for things like electrolytes and a waste byproduct called creatinine, will help your healthcare provider understand how your kidneys are working. The blood tests and urinalysis may help your healthcare team know why your kidney stones formed and what steps might be recommended to manage and prevent further kidney stones.

To be able to tell where the kidney stone is located in your body, your healthcare provider may order one or more of the following diagnostic tests:

- Ultrasound (An ultrasound is a type of imaging test that uses sound waves. It takes pictures of the organs and other structures in your body. myhealth.alberta.ca/health/tests-treatments/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=acm0328)
- X-ray of your kidney, ureter, and bladder (x-rays are a form of radiation, like light or radio waves, that can be focused into a beam, much like a flashlight beam. Unlike a beam of light, though, X-rays can pass through most objects, including the human body).
- CT Scan (A computed tomography (CT) scan uses X-rays to make detailed pictures of structures inside of the body). <https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/tests-treatments/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=hw233596>

Helpful tools and resources on next page.



Review your test results

It is important to know what your test results are and what they mean. Take time to discuss your results with your healthcare provider. Medical terms can be hard to understand. And even common words like “positive” or “negative” might mean something different for medical tests. Ask your healthcare provider for explanations and examples to make sure you fully understand.

You might ask:

“What does this mean for me?”

“Is there a current concern? If so, what is it?”



Helpful tools and resources on next page.



Helpful tools and resources

See your results and health information using secure online tools:

MyHealth Records

See your lab results, immunizations, and some other results with a MyHealth Records account. Sign up at myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords

MyAHS Connect

See your health information, manage your Alberta Health Services appointments, and interact directly with some members of your healthcare team. Ask your healthcare provider how to access your MyAHS Connect account. Learn more at www.ahs.ca/myahsconnect



Fluid Intake

- **The most important thing for kidney stone prevention and management is making sure you drink enough fluid.** The crystals that make up a kidney stone are less likely to form if you drink enough fluid.
- Water is the best fluid. It is recommended that you drink between 2-3L of water per day or 8-10 cups. If you don't already drink that much, slowly increase how much you drink.
- Limiting the amount of sugary drinks you have may also help prevent kidney stones from forming.
- If you have other health conditions, such as problems with your heart, your healthcare provider may suggest drinking smaller amounts of fluid. Always check with your healthcare provider before making any changes.

Pain Management

- Your healthcare provider may recommend over the counter medicine to relieve your pain, such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Depending on your pain level and where the kidney stone is located, your healthcare provider may also recommend other medications to help you manage the pain you are experiencing.

Nutrition

- Your healthcare provider may recommend you follow a diet that helps manage and prevent kidney stones. You may be asked to see a dietitian who can help you incorporate a healthy diet for managing and preventing kidney stones.
- You can find specific diet information here for kidney stones:
www.ahs.ca/assets/info/nutrition/if-nfs-kidney-stones-and-your-diet.pdf

Healthy Lifestyle Management

- Physical activity and eating healthy can help you stay at healthy body weight. This can help lower your risk of kidney stones.
- Your health care provider will recommend what is best for you for physical activity. For most people 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity aerobic activity every week, is recommended. Moderate intensity means your breathing and heart rate are a little higher than normal and you're sweating a little by the time you're finished. There are lots of ways to get 150 minutes of physical activity per week. You can do:
 - 30 minutes of activity, five days a week
 - 10 minutes of activity, fifteen times a week (e.g., during lunch or breaks at work)
- If you haven't been active lately, start slow. You can slowly increase how long you're active for. Set manageable and realistic goals for yourself.



Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral

- Not all patients with Kidney Stones need a referral. Depending on your symptoms, the size of your kidney stone and where it is located in your body you may need a referral to a Urologist.
- A Urologist is a medical specialist who focuses on helping patients with diseases and conditions of the male and female urinary systems, as well as the male reproductive system.
- You should hear about the progress of the referral to your Urologist within 3 months.
- Your urologist will assess you and your condition and recommend what treatment is best for you and your needs.



Helpful tools and resources

To learn about how to prepare for your specialist appointment, visit ahs.ca/quire



Start your management and watch your symptoms

As you try different management options, remember that if something doesn't work the way you thought it would, think about other options and connect with your healthcare provider to find what will work for you.

Remember to watch for:

- Fever
- Blood in your urine
- Increasing or severe pain in your side, belly, groin or genitals
- Increasing pain when peeing
- Not being able to pee
- Peeing more or less

Some kidney stones may need to be monitored regularly. In these cases your healthcare provider may ask you to have an annual x-ray or ultrasound of the kidneys. Any nutrition, medication and health changes can be reviewed at that time.

Watching your symptoms is important. Call your healthcare provider or Health Link at 811 if you have any concerns. You might feel like you don't want to bother your healthcare team, but no detail is too small to share. If it matters to you, it will matter to your healthcare team.

You can clarify with your healthcare team what to expect in terms of follow-up communication. Call your healthcare team whenever you:

- have questions
- notice your symptoms getting worse
- have problems with your medicine
- haven't gotten test results or heard back about an appointment in the time you had agreed to



Helpful tools and resources

If you can't reach your healthcare provider and need health advice or information, call Health Link anytime, day or night, by dialing **811**.



There are many things that you may need to consider on your journey with kidney stones. It is important to be able to work with your healthcare team to decide what is best for you, in your life, given your own unique circumstances.

You don't need to do everything all at once. Take realistic and manageable steps. Consider why making a change may benefit you and the things that matter to you.



Helpful tools and resources

Find resources and services in your community:

211 helps Albertans find the right resource or service for whatever issue they need help with, at the right time. 211 is available anytime, day or night, by phone, text, and online chat. It is confidential and available in over 170 languages over the phone. To contact 211:

- Call 211
- Text INFO to 211
- Visit ab.211.ca

Workshops, classes, and services from the Alberta Healthy Living Program can help you to improve your health and quality of life with a chronic condition: ahs.ca/ahlp

Chronic Disease Management support: ahs.ca/cdm

Health Information & Tools: myhealth.alberta.ca/Pages/HealthInfoToolsDefault.aspx

Resources

There's lots of information out there, and it can be confusing to know what information is accurate and true. Here are some great resources that may be helpful for you.

- Canadian Urological Association www.cua.org/system/files/PIB/PIB35_en.pdf
- National Kidney Foundation: www.kidney.org/atoz/content/kidneystones

Get help now:

- Emergency: 911
- Health Link: 811

Mental health, addiction, and crisis support:

- Addiction Helpline: 1-866-332-2322
- Mental Health Helpline: 1-877-303-2642
- Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741741
- Crisis Services Canada: 1-833-456-4566, or visit talksuicide.ca

Community and social supports

- Call Alberta 211 or visit ab.211.ca
- Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818, or visit alberta.ca/family-violence-find-supports.aspx
- Income Support: 1-866-644-5135, or visit alberta.ca/income-support.aspx

Alberta Health Services programs

- Home Care: ahs.ca/homecare
- Find a Dietitian: ahs.ca/nutrition
- Spiritual Care Services: ahs.ca/spiritualcare

Primary care (family doctors)

- Find a doctor: ahs.ca/findadoctor
- Virtual care guide: ahs.ca/virtualhealth

Patient concerns and feedback

- Office of Alberta Health Advocates: alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates.aspx
- Alberta Health Services Patient Relations: 1-855-550-2555, or visit ahs.ca/patientfeedback

Helpful tip

If you don't have a computer and printer at home, ask a family member, friend, or your healthcare provider if they can print a resource that you are interested in. You can also visit your local library to access a computer that is connected to the internet.

Important phone numbers

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Notes

Use this space to take notes.

About this Pathway

The AHS Provincial Pathways Unit co-developed this patient pathway in partnership with patient and family advisors, primary and specialty care providers in Alberta. It is current as of **March 2023**.

Authors & Conflict of Interest Declaration

This pathway was reviewed and revised by a multi-disciplinary co-design team including urologists, primary care providers and patient and family advisors from across Alberta.

Pathway Review Process

Primary care pathways undergo scheduled review every two years, or earlier if there is a clinically significant change in knowledge or practice. The next scheduled review is January 2025. However, we welcome feedback at any time. Please email comments to AlbertaPathways@ahs.ca.

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Disclaimer

This pathway represents evidence-based best practice but does not override the individual responsibility of health care professionals to make decisions appropriate to their patients using their own clinical judgment given their patients' specific clinical conditions, in consultation with patients/alternate decision makers. The pathway is not a substitute for clinical judgment or advice of a qualified health care professional. It is expected that all users will seek advice of other appropriately qualified and regulated health care providers with any issues transcending their specific knowledge, scope of regulated practice or professional competence