

Frailty: ageing with kidney problems



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As you get older, you are more likely to develop illnesses which can affect your kidneys. People with kidney problems can also find that health issues that are more often seen in older people, such as getting tired easily or poor memory, occur at a younger age and can be more common than in the general population. Some people with kidney disease are also managing other conditions such as diabetes, heart failure and arthritis. These can also make people feel older than they really are and make them more likely to become frail. This leaflet explains what frailty is and how it can affect people with kidney disease.

What is frailty?

Frailty is a decline in your health that is related to the ageing process. People living with frailty may have difficulty coping with changes in their physical or mental health and wellbeing.

Your level of frailty can change over time. It can challenge your sense of self and may affect how you are seen and treated by others, including healthcare professionals. If you or your family are living with frailty you may need to adapt how you live your life and find new ways to manage day to day tasks.

What are the symptoms of frailty?

The most common symptoms of frailty are:

- **Changes in mobility** You may not be able to walk or stand for as long as you used to.
- **Memory problems** You may find it harder to remember important things like appointments and have to rely on others to remind you.
- **Fatigue or tiredness** You may feel like your body has slowed down and that you have less energy than you used to.
- **Changes in sleep** You may find that you need more sleep at night or that you need to sleep during the day.

How can frailty affect me?

- **Mobility** A lack of movement or exercise can weaken your bones and reduce your muscle strength. This can lead to a loss of confidence and an increased risk of falls and bone fractures, as well as making you more vulnerable to illness.
- **Cognition/memory** Living with frailty does not mean that you lack the ability to make decisions for yourself or are not capable of living a full and independent life. However, you may notice that your memory is changing and you need to find other ways to remember appointments and manage medications. You may find it harder to concentrate than you used to and may need to take more time or breaks when you are trying to do things at home
- **Fatigue and generally slowing down** You may notice that you are doing fewer activities around the house and for pleasure. This may mean sitting down more at home and becoming more reliant on others for shopping or cleaning. This may make you feel lonely or down.



Why is it important to talk about frailty?

You may find it hard to talk about issues relating to ageing and frailty. You may feel embarrassed that you are not as active as you used to be or that you need to rely more on other people for help. It is important to remember that you are not alone in the challenges you have been experiencing and that talking to someone about them can often be the first step to getting help and feeling better. You can talk with your family, friends, or your healthcare team - whoever you feel comfortable with.

Benefits of talking about frailty include:

- Talking about your concerns can help you get the help you need. Often the earlier we try to deal with any issues, the easier it is to help support you in your own personal situation
- Often just talking and having someone listen to you can help you gain more perspective on your concerns and help to reduce the stress and anxiety that they may be causing. Knowing that you are not alone in experiencing these challenges can take away some of loneliness that can come with them.



What can I do to help myself?

Stay physically active

It is important to keep as physically active as possible within your own abilities/limitations. Exercise can help improve your mobility and your ability to perform physical tasks. It can also help prevent heart disease and strokes, as well as improving your thinking skills and boosting your mood.

For your own safety, it is important that your chosen activity matches your current physical ability. For people who are more physically restricted, this may mean simply standing more or taking part in chair-based exercises, such as classes run by **Age UK**. For other people this may include running, going to the local gym and taking part in exercises specifically designed for people with kidney disease, such as those run by the **Move project**. See the back page for web links. Talk to your healthcare team if you are unsure what type of physical activity may be best for you.

Keep your mind active

Memory loss is not inevitable as we age and there are lots of things that you can do to keep your mind sharp. Keeping physically active, looking after your physical health and making sure that you get enough sleep are all important in protecting your brain's health. Try taking up a new hobby such as reading, sewing, crosswords or other puzzles that involve your brain having to think in different ways. A lot of people find that keeping their minds active and having an active social life helps too.



Plan ahead

It can be helpful to think about your priorities in life (for example, family, friends, a hobby, staying at home) and to discuss this with someone whom you trust and with your healthcare team. This can help ensure that you, your loved ones and your healthcare team can focus your care as much as possible on what is important to you. This is called **advance care planning** and is the process of expressing your preferences, values and goals about your future wishes and priorities for your health and care. It enables better provision and planning of care to allow people living with frailty to live as well as possible. You can find more information in the links below.

Ask for help if you need it

There are lots of resources available to help with any issues you may be having. Your kidney team, GP and community team will be happy to point you in the right direction to get the help you need. There is a list of resources on the back page of this leaflet to get you started.

What other type help is available?

The type of help you may need will depend on how ageing has affected you.

- If you need help with personal tasks such as dressing or cleaning yourself, you may consider having a carer come into your home for a few hours a week.
- You may need special equipment at home to keep you safe and to make it easier to manage independently, such as a walking aid or bath and toilet rail.
- You could consider getting a personal alarm so that you can easily alert your loved ones or the emergency services if you have a fall or are not feeling well.

The **AgeUK** website has further information about this type of support.

Who can I ask to help me?

Family and friends

Family and friends can be invaluable in helping to motivate you to stay active and maintain your social activities. They can help with tasks that you may no longer be able to do by yourself, such as driving you to appointments or helping with the shopping.

Your GP

Your GP can help you with social support, such as having carers at home. Your GP can refer you for assessment for any equipment that you may need such as walking aids or bath-rails, to help you manage better at home. They can also refer you to specialists if you need further help, for example, to a falls or memory clinic.

Your kidney team

The doctors and nurses on your kidney team can link you in with specialised services for people with kidney disease, such as a kidney dietician or counsellor.



Where can I find out more information?

- Kidney Care UK - Patient information - www.kidneycareuk.org
- Advance care planning - advancecareplan.org.uk
- Age UK - www.ageuk.org.uk
- Carers UK - www.carersuk.org
- Dementia UK - www.dementiauk.org
- Move project - <http://move.bangor.ac.uk>



Contact us



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