

MARCH IS NATIONAL KIDNEY MONTH

If you have a kidney stone, you may already know how painful it can be. Most kidney stones pass out of the body without help from a doctor. But sometimes a stone will not pass. It may even get larger. Your doctor can help.

You should call a doctor if you have any of the following signs:

- extreme pain in your back or side that will not go away
- blood in your urine
- fever and chills
- vomiting
- urine that smells bad or looks cloudy
- a burning feeling when you urinate

What do my kidneys do?

Your kidneys are bean-shaped organs, each about the size of your fist. They are located near the middle of your back, just below the rib cage, one on each side of the spine. The kidneys are sophisticated trash collectors. Every day, your kidneys process about 200 quarts of blood to sift out about 2 quarts of waste products and extra water. The wastes and extra water become urine, which flows to your bladder through tubes called ureters. Your bladder stores urine until you go to the bathroom. If your kidneys did not remove these wastes, they would build up in the blood and damage your body. In addition to removing wastes, your kidneys help control blood pressure. They also help make red blood cells and keep your bones strong.

What is a kidney stone?

A kidney stone is a solid piece of material that forms in a kidney out of substances in the urine. A stone may stay in the kidney or break loose and travel down the urinary tract. A small stone may pass all the way out of the body without causing too much pain. A larger stone may get stuck in a ureter, the bladder, or the urethra. A problem stone can block the flow of urine and cause great pain.

Are all kidney stones alike?

No. Doctors have found four major types of kidney stones.

- The most common type of stone contains **calcium**. Calcium that is not used by the bones and muscles goes to the kidneys.
- A **struvite** stone may form after an infection in the urinary system.
- A **uric acid** stone may form when the urine contains too much acid.
- **Cystine** stones are rare. Cystine is one of the building blocks that make up muscles, nerves, and other parts of the body.

What do kidney stones look like?

Kidney stones may be as small as a grain of sand or as large as a pearl. Some stones are even as big as golf balls. Stones may be smooth or jagged. They are usually yellow or brown.

If you have a stone that will not pass by itself, your doctor may need to take steps to get rid of it. In the past, the only way to remove a problem stone was through surgery. Now, doctors have new ways to remove problem stones. They are Shock Waves, Tunnel surgery, and Ureteroscopy. Ask your doctor which method is right for you.

Why do I need to know the kind of stone?

The therapy your doctor gives you depends on the type of stone you have. For example, a medicine that helps prevent calcium stones will not work if you have a struvite stone. The diet changes that help prevent uric acid stones may not work to prevent calcium stones. Therefore, careful analysis of the stone will help guide your treatment.

What can I do to avoid more stones?

Drink more water. Drinking lots of water helps to flush away the substances that form stones in the kidneys.



Your doctor may ask you to eat more of some foods and to cut back on other foods. For example, if you have a uric acid stone, your doctor may ask you to eat less meat, because meat breaks down to make uric acid.

If you are prone to forming calcium oxalate stones, you may need to limit foods that are high in oxalate. These foods include rhubarb, beets, spinach, and chocolate. The doctor may give you medicines to prevent calcium and uric acid stones.

Points to Remember

- Most stones will pass out of the body without a doctor's help.
- See your doctor if you have severe pain in your back or side that will not go away.
- See your doctor if you have blood in your urine-urine will appear pink.
- When you pass a stone, try to catch it in a strainer to show your doctor.
- Drink lots of water to prevent more kidney stones from forming.
- Talk with your doctor about other ways to avoid more stones.