



**KEYS TO
A LONG LIFE**

Just the Facts: How to Talk to Your Healthcare Team

Who is on my healthcare team?

Your care team is the staff who cares for you. Your doctor is like the “head coach,” and your social worker, dietitian, nurses, and techs are part of the team. You may also have a family doctor and see other specialists. The most important member of your team is *you*.

Why am I the most important team member?

Your team is busy caring for many patients, but you take care of just one: *yourself*. Learn all you can about your illness and its treatment. Learn what is normal for you, so you can tell your team when something is wrong.

Your care team needs to know how you feel, both physically and emotionally. They cannot read your mind, so you need to tell them when you have a problem. They want to know what concerns or confuses you, so they can help you follow your medication, treatment, and diet plans. Your team will help you set and reach realistic goals.

What does my team do for me?

Your team is important because their goal is to keep you healthy. Your dialysis doctor prescribes medicines and follows your care. Nurses and techs make sure you get safe, effective dialysis, based on your doctor’s orders. Your dietitian teaches you to plan renal meals. Your social worker can help you and your family cope with dialysis. He or she may also help you sign up for services you are eligible for.

How should I talk to my care team?

Ask questions! Patients who study their options and help decide about care are stronger members of their care teams. Write your questions down so you can remember them. Ask your *most important* question first.

Repeat back the answers you hear so you can make sure you understand them. Write them down. If you don’t know the meaning of a medical term, ask.

Tell the truth—your team can’t help you feel better if you’re not honest with them.

Be as clear as you can when you have a problem. If you have a pain, be able to say where it is, when it happens, for how long, and what makes it better or worse. This helps your team help you.

Your care team members are people, too. Stay calm and be polite. If everyone is busy, ask if they can help you when they have a chance. If you respect them, they will respect you.



How can I make sure I get what I need from my healthcare team?

Problem	How can I prevent it?	What should I ask?
I always feel so rushed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before an appointment, write down your questions. • Don't get sidetracked by small talk. Be pleasant, but make sure you get meaningful answers to all your questions. • If you run out of time, make another appointment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wrote down some questions—can you please answer them for me before you leave?
After I've seen my doctor, I have a hard time telling my family what she/he said to me.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat back what the doctor said to be sure you understand. • Write down what you heard. • Bring a family member to the appointment, if you can. • Ask if there is written information you could take home to your family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can I tell you what I heard you say, so you can tell me if I heard it right? • Do you have a pamphlet on this problem that I could take home with me?
There is so much about my kidney disease I don't understand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List the things that confuse you. Ask the social worker to help you find people to answer your questions. • Go to the library and do your own research. • Join an AAKP or NKF chapter (see below) to learn from other patients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the best person on my team to ask about _____? • Do you have anything I could read on _____?

Where can I find out more about working with my healthcare team?

- Life Options Rehabilitation Program – (800) 468-7777 or visit our websites: www.lifeoptions.org and www.kidneyschool.org.
- The American Association of Kidney Patients (AAKP) – (800) 749-AAKP or visit their website at www.aakp.org.
- The National Kidney Foundation (NKF) – (800) 622-9010 or visit their website at www.kidney.org.



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