



Feature story

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### **Kidney stones: Know the signs**

For Immediate Release

**(COLUMBUS, Neb.)** – If you've ever had a kidney stone, you know the pain that sends more than half a million people to emergency rooms every year. And you are far from alone — one in 10 people will get a kidney stone at some point. “Kidney stones are a common occurrence,” said Mark Howerter, MD, chief medical officer at Columbus Community Hospital. “In my 30 years of working as an emergency room physician, it would be uncommon to work three shifts in a row and not see at least one patient with a kidney stone.”

Here's what you need to know about kidney stones, including symptoms and how to prevent them.

#### **What are kidney stones, and what causes them?**

Kidney stones are hard, tiny objects that form in the kidneys. Your urine contains a variety of waste chemicals, which are usually swept out of your body when you urinate. But when there isn't enough water in your urine, those chemicals begin to form crystals that clump together and turn into kidney stones.

Once formed, a kidney stone can stay put in the kidneys or pass through the urinary tract. If the stone is very small, it may pass through your system without causing much pain. But stones that don't pass through easily can cause urine to back up in the kidney, bladder or urethra.

#### **What to watch for**

The smallest kidney stones are about the size of a grain of sand and cause little to no symptoms. As they get bigger, however, you're more likely to start feeling discomfort, pain or other symptoms.

Here are some signs you might have a kidney stone:

- Pain in your side or back.
- Blood in your urine.
- Upset stomach.



- Fever and chills.
- Off-smelling urine.
- Urine that looks cloudy or dark.

### **What to do if you think you have a kidney stone**

If you spot any of the signs of a kidney stone, call your health care provider as soon as possible. They may suggest that you drink more water to try and flush the stone out. If that happens, strain your urine and bring any kidney stone pieces to your appointment.

Pain from kidney stones can be severe, so you may want to take Tylenol or ibuprofen. If you are still in severe discomfort, you may need to call your doctor or visit the emergency department, where a doctor can prescribe other medications that with the pain and aid stone passage. "Passing a kidney stone can be a miserable experience," said Howerter. "Know that there is medical help if you need it."

If the kidney stone doesn't pass, your health care provider may recommend surgery or other minimally invasive techniques to remove it.

### **How to prevent kidney stones**

There are steps you can take to reduce your chances of developing a kidney stone:

- Drink enough water every day to keep your urine clear or very light yellow.
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. These make urine less acidic, which discourages kidney stone formation.
- Avoid animal protein. It makes urine more acidic.
- Cut back on sugar. Sugar-sweetened drinks may increase your risk of kidney stones.

If you have questions about kidney stones or kidney health, make an appointment with one of our providers by visiting [columbushosp.org](http://columbushosp.org).

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