

A top-down photograph of a rustic metal plate filled with fresh raspberries and blueberries. A white cream or yogurt is drizzled over the raspberries. The plate sits on a dark, textured surface. The background is a dark, textured surface.

Kidney MAGAZINE

SUMMER 2026

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COOKING LESS THIS SUMMER

An easier way to the table with less stress and just as much flavour

FROZEN BERRIES

A sweet take on a modern dessert

AGING WITH INTENTION

Navigating change with stability and awareness

WHEN THE CALL COMES

A story of grief and hope through life's most difficult times

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letter from the editor

Dear reader,

Welcome to the summer edition of *Kidney Magazine*. I often find that summer brings a welcome variety of pace, inviting us to travel and explore the outdoors, while also giving us a chance to slow down and enjoy the warmer days. Some things are easier—like taking care of our mental health by connecting with friends and family—while other things, like cooking kidney-friendly meals feel like a challenge when the last place we want to be is in a hot kitchen. This inspired our "Cooking Less This Summer" article, where we explore quick meals that don't require the oven. It is packed with refreshing, kidney-friendly recipes that keep your kitchen cool and give you more time for summer fun.

While out for brunch with a friend recently, we had a frozen berry dessert that brought back the simplicity of childhood treats, but with a more refined, adult take. Cool, bright, and not overly sweet, it was a good reminder that the best warm-weather indulgences don't need much to be memorable. It also sparked the idea for our feature recipe on the cover.

Beyond the kitchen, we explore simple tools to help our kidney health, like reducing stress and lowering blood pressure through music and navigating the aging process. We also take an exciting look at the latest medical breakthroughs and therapies bringing new hope to our community.

In a special conversation in "When the Call Comes", Janet shares openly about dealing with grief. Through her story of profound loss, which often touches patient and caregiver paths, she provides gentle guidance on navigating this road. She shows that through hardship, we find immense resilience.

And finally, don't miss our interview with a powerhouse grandfather-granddaughter duo in "A Story of Courage, Compassion, and Hope", which beautifully highlights the strength we can gather through family, legacy, and shared purpose. Whether you are reading this by a sunny window or in a comfortable chair, we hope this issue brings you practical tools, comfort, and inspiration.

Warmly,

Andrea

Iced Berries with Hot Limoncello White Chocolate Sauce

2 cups frozen mixed berries (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries)
½ cup Greek yogurt
60 g (2 oz) white chocolate, chopped (choose lower-phosphorus brands if available)
1–2 Tbsp limoncello (optional, keep moderate)
1 tsp fresh lemon zest
½ tsp vanilla extract

Wash and pat dry berries. Place on a tray and freeze 4-6 hours or overnight.

Divide frozen berries into four small bowls. Let sit 2–3 minutes so they soften slightly but stay icy cold.

In a small saucepan, heat Greek yogurt over low heat (do not boil). Add chopped white chocolate and stir gently until melted.

Remove from heat; stir in limoncello, if using, lemon zest, and vanilla.

Drizzle the warm sauce over the cold berries at the table and serve right away for the hot–cold contrast.

Makes 4 ½ cup servings.

This modern dessert builds on Italy's tradition of pairing fresh fruit with simple, cream-based sauces. Over time, cooks embraced temperature contrast to create a striking hot-and-cold experience. The addition of white chocolate adds a contemporary, indulgent finish while keeping the preparation quick and no-bake.

For a kidney-friendly version, keep portions moderate, choose lower-sodium ingredients, and use a low-fat dairy substitute. The result remains refreshing and elegant, balancing tart fruit with a warm, velvety sweetness.



Aging with Intention

Navigating Change with Stability and Awareness

Contributor: Megan Borkum, MD, MHA, FRCPC

Growing older often brings heightened awareness of how the body changes. Energy may fluctuate, sleep patterns can shift, and routines that once felt effortless may need adjustment.

For those living with kidney disease, these changes can feel more complex, yet they also offer an opportunity to approach health and daily life with greater intention.



With age, shifts in energy, sleep, and daily habits are natural. When combined with a chronic condition like kidney disease, these changes can seem more pronounced. Even so, this stage of life can remain one of stability and fulfillment. With thoughtful adjustments, it is possible to maintain independence, support overall wellbeing, and continue finding meaning and joy. Recognizing these changes early helps make adapting more manageable.

Responding to Sleep Changes

Sleep plays a critical restorative role for both the brain and the body, making consistent rest essential for healthy aging. A regular sleep schedule supports the circadian rhythm—the body’s internal clock—which regulates hormone release, energy levels, and metabolic health, all of which are closely linked to kidney function.

However, sleep patterns often change with age, and kidney disease can add complexity. You may experience lighter sleep, more frequent waking, or less restful mornings. Factors such as medication timing, fluid balance, discomfort, or restless leg syndrome may contribute.

In these situations, consistency is especially valuable. Going to bed and waking at the same time each day helps regulate your internal clock. Establishing a calming pre-sleep

routine and good ‘sleep hygiene’—such as dimming lights, limiting screen time, or engaging in quiet activities—can signal to your body that it is time to rest. If disruptions persist, tracking your sleep patterns and discussing them with your care team can help identify manageable solutions.

The Importance of Routine in Retirement

Retirement often brings welcome flexibility, but it can also remove the structure that once anchored daily life. For those with kidney disease, routine isn’t just helpful; it is also protective.

Reduces stress

Routine reduces stress by creating predictability. When daily activities follow a steady rhythm, there is less uncertainty and fewer decisions, which helps calm the mind and body. Knowing when to monitor symptoms, move, or attend appointments fosters a sense of control.

Simple anchors—such as a morning check-in, a daily walk, or scheduled hobbies—serve as reliable touchpoints. These consistent patterns reduce mental load and support emotional wellbeing. Small

The Kidney Foundation of Canada’s *Living with Reduced Kidney Function Handbook* provides tips for managing your daily routine. Learn more at [kidney.ca](https://www.kidney.ca).

daily rituals, such as enjoying tea, journaling, or preparing kidney-friendly meals at regular times, can also provide comfort and balance.

Supports medication and treatment adherence

Changes in routine can lead to missed medication doses. Many individuals with CKD take medications to manage blood pressure, diabetes, anemia, or mineral balance. A consistent daily schedule helps ensure medications are taken as prescribed. Tools such as pill organizers or reminders can reinforce adherence and support kidney health.

Helps stabilize blood pressure and blood sugar

Diabetes and high blood pressure are leading causes of kidney disease in Canada. Regular meal times,

Research indicates obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) can be a factor in chronic kidney disease progression. Patients with OSA should speak to their doctor about possible treatments or lifestyle changes to reduce the impact.



consistent physical activity, and structured sleep habits help stabilize blood sugar and support healthy blood pressure—both essential for protecting kidney function.

The Kidney Care Centre at University Health Network notes that lifestyle consistency plays an important role in managing these risks. A predictable daily rhythm helps regulate hormones such as insulin and cortisol, reduces sudden blood-sugar fluctuations, and supports more stable cardiovascular responses.

Nutritional Needs in Later Years

Meeting the body's changing nutritional needs while protecting kidney function requires some thoughtful balance. As we age, maintaining muscle strength, bone health, energy levels, and immune function becomes increasingly important—and kidney disease can complicate this by affecting how the body processes certain nutrients.

Here are some key nutritional needs to focus on as we age.

Adequate protein without overdoing it

Protein helps preserve muscle mass, which naturally declines with age. However, depending on the stage of kidney disease, excessive protein intake can place additional strain on the kidneys. The goal is often to choose high-quality protein sources in the right portions, such as eggs, fish, poultry, tofu, or Greek yogurt, while following guidance from a healthcare team.

Enough calories to maintain strength

Appetite often changes with age, and some people with kidney disease may eat less due to fatigue, medications, or dietary restrictions. Not eating enough can lead to unintentional weight loss and muscle wasting. Nutrient-dense meals and snacks can help support energy needs while staying within dietary restrictions.

Supporting bone health

Aging and kidney disease both increase the risk of bone loss. Calcium and vitamin D play essential roles, but supplementation should be taken only under medical supervision, as kidney disease alters how these nutrients are processed.

Prioritizing fibre for digestion and heart health

Constipation can become more common with age and with certain medications. Diets with food rich in fibre, such as a Mediterranean diet that meets kidney-friendly guidelines, can support digestion, blood sugar control, serum potassium levels, and cardiovascular health.

Remember, the most important nutritional strategy is personalization. Healthy aging with kidney disease means finding the right balance to support strength, independence, and overall wellbeing.

A monthly cooking evening with friends can provide a steady social anchor, and the shared preparation of kidney-friendly meals reinforces healthy eating habits, strengthens social connection, and supports overall wellbeing.



Emotional Wellbeing and Staying Connected

While physical health often takes priority, emotional wellbeing is equally essential to quality of life, especially when managing a chronic condition such as kidney disease. Aging can bring shifts in social circles, mobility, and independence, all of which may increase the risk of loneliness or low mood.

Staying connected with others helps protect mental and physical health. Regular interaction—whether through family, friends, peer groups, or community programs—can reduce feelings of isolation and provide encouragement to manage daily routines and treatment plans. Even brief moments of connection, such as a phone call, a shared meal, or attending a weekly class, can have a meaningful impact.

Emotional health also involves acknowledging the challenges of chronic illness. It's normal to feel frustrated, fatigued, or uncertain at times. Finding healthy ways to process these feelings, such as conversation, journaling, mindfulness practices, or speaking with a counsellor, can help build resilience and a sense of control.

Trying something new

Engaging in activities that bring a sense of purpose is equally important. Creative hobbies, volunteering, learning new skills, or participating in wellness programs can reinforce

identity beyond illness and contribute to deeper feelings of fulfillment.

Support systems matter. Whether through healthcare teams, peer support networks, or community resources, having people to turn to is crucial. Programs offered through the Kidney Wellness Hub, such as Art for Wellness, the Resilient Kitchen, gentle movement sessions, mindfulness videos, and peer support meetups, are valuable opportunities for engagement and support.



Moving Forward with Intention

Aging with kidney disease is not simply about managing decline; it is about adapting with intention and continuing to shape a life that feels steady, purposeful, and fulfilling. While the body may require greater attention and certain routines may need to evolve, this stage of life can also bring a deeper sense of self awareness and resilience. By prioritizing consistency, staying attentive to physical and emotional changes, and maintaining meaningful daily structure, one can navigate the years ahead with confidence and clarity.

Loneliness can pose a health risk for retirees with CKD, as it can worsen depression, reduce adherence to treatment, and harm overall health.

Social isolation may also increase inflammation and cardiovascular risk, further complicating CKD management. Addressing loneliness is therefore an important part of maintaining wellbeing.

Often, small, steady habits make the biggest difference—maintaining regular routines, staying connected, listening to the body, and making time for meaningful activities. Small changes in mobility and balance may influence confidence and safety, making regular movement and awareness of one's surroundings especially valuable.

Likewise, occasional forgetfulness is common with age, but staying mentally engaged and tracking appointments and symptoms supports better self-management. These thoughtful adjustments not only support physical wellbeing but also foster independence, peace of mind, and greater control over the golden years ahead.

Tips for Getting Started

- Try one physical, one social, and one creative activity for balance (ex. a walking group, an evening mahjong game with friends, and an online art class)
- Start small and stay consistent instead of overloading your schedule
- Choose activities that give you a sense of purpose and enjoyment

Remember, it's never too late to learn something new. Colleges or universities often offer tuition-free classes for seniors. Check your local listings for regular group activities (bird watching, gardening, cooking, etc).

Cooking Less *This Summer*

This summer, we're exploring an easier way to the table. Learn how to enjoy a satisfying, healthy meal with little fuss.

Contributor: Dani Renouf, RD, MSc



It's easy to assume that a kidney-friendly meal that's both nutritious and satisfying requires time at the oven or stovetop. In reality, for people managing kidney health, consistency matters far more than complexity.

A flexible, low-effort approach can reduce stress, limit reliance on high-sodium convenience foods, and make it easier to stay within dietary guidelines. Just as importantly, it supports mental wellbeing—food should feel like a natural part of your routine, not a burden or restriction. This approach is especially helpful in warmer weather, when appetite often dips. Lighter, build-your-own options—like toast combinations, protein boards, or chilled bowls—can be easier to enjoy while still meeting nutritional needs. These ideas are less about following strict recipes and more about a mindset: start with a few quality ingredients, keep sodium in check, and let fresh flavours do the work. With minimal effort, you can create meals that are both satisfying and supportive of your health.

MEAL PREP WITHOUT PREPPING

Traditional meal prep can take hours of planning and cooking, but for many people that structure isn't realistic or sustainable. Shifting from preparing meals to preparing components redefines what dinner can be. Chopping vegetables, cooking a batch of rice, or roasting a tray of chicken at the start of the week can remove the biggest barriers to dinner time without locking you into the same dish for days. You can mix and match depending on your mood, while still staying within kidney-friendly guidelines like managing sodium, potassium, and phosphorus.

Protein Snack Board Meal

This grazing-style dinner is filling and nutritionally complete.



What you need:

Hard-boiled eggs
Whole grain crackers

Cheese (small portion)
Apple, grapes, or berries
Veggie sticks
Yogurt dip with herbs and black pepper
Walnuts (small handful)

Assemble on a plate—think adult lunchable, but balanced enough to count as dinner. By combining small portions, you naturally build a more varied plate that makes portion control easier. You can eat what you need and stop when you're satisfied.

BUILD A ROUTINE, NOT A RIGID PLAN

Rather than mapping out every meal, develop a loose rhythm. Maybe you shop once or twice a week, keep a few go-to meals in mind, and rely on your prepped ingredients to fill in the gaps. This kind of structure provides consistency without pressure, making it easier to stick with long term.

LOW EFFORT, HIGH REWARDS

These meals only require assembly of already prepared components, like pre-washed greens, vegetables on hand, and low-sodium vinaigrette. The goal isn't perfection—it's making kidney-friendly choices easier in the moment. Instead of following strict recipes, think in simple combinations: a protein, a grain, and a vegetable. Grilled chicken with rice and sliced vegetables one night can turn into a wrap the next. This keeps meals varied and reduces food fatigue, which is important when dietary restrictions are involved.

Lemon Chicken Cucumber Grain Bowl

Balanced, refreshing, and built from ready-to-use ingredients



What you need:

Pre-cooked quinoa or rice (chilled)
Rotisserie chicken (skin removed, shredded)
Sliced cucumber
Baby spinach or arugula
Olive oil
Fresh lemon juice

Layer everything in a bowl and drizzle with olive oil and lemon. Add fresh herbs if you have them. Choose unseasoned chicken when possible and go light on packaged grains to keep sodium lower and manage potassium.

Deconstructed Sushi Plate

Fresh, customizable, and uses ready-to-eat ingredients

**What you need:**

Pre-cooked rice (chilled)
Cucumber
Shredded carrot
Thinly sliced zucchini
Imitation crab or cooked shrimp
2 Tbsp soy sauce substitute* (see below)
Light drizzle of sesame oil

Place rice on a plate and layer ingredients on top and sprinkle with soy sauce substitute and sesame oil. Watch sodium in sauces and portion higher-potassium ingredients as needed.

***Soy sauce substitute (from kidneycommunitykitchen.ca)**

1/3 cup beef broth, no salt added
1/3 cup red wine vinegar
1 Tbsp honey
1/4 tsp ground ginger
1/2 tsp garlic powder
1/8 tsp black pepper
1 1/4 cups water

Combine all ingredients in a small pot and boil gently uncovered for 5-10 minutes until mixture reduces to about 1 1/2 cups (325 ml). If you won't use the full recipe within a week, freeze extra portions in ice-cub trays for later use.

COOL KITCHEN, COOLER MEALS

When summer heat makes cooking feel like a chore, meals that rely on chilling instead of heating can be a game-changer, especially for people managing kidney disease. Think crisp salads, no-cook wraps, yogurt bowls, and grain dishes served cold; these options help reduce time over a hot stove while still supporting balanced, kidney-friendly eating. Chilled meals can help patients stay nourished, hydrated, and energized without added stress. It's a simple shift that keeps kitchens cool while making it easier to stick to dietary needs all season long.

Tuna and White Bean Salad

High-protein, pantry-friendly, and filling



SUMMER SAVER

In addition to removing the need for recipes when time is at a premium, assembly dinners support better portion and nutrient control.

By building a meal from components like pre-cooked chicken, berries, washed greens, and cooked brown rice or quinoa, you can more easily manage sodium, potassium, and phosphorus levels.

What you need:

No-salt-added canned tuna
No-salt-added white beans (rinsed well)
Chopped celery
Lemon juice
Olive oil
Chopped lettuce

Mix everything except the lettuce together and chill. Before serving, spoon on top of lettuce.

Rinsing canned beans can reduce sodium significantly. Beans can be a helpful addition, but balance with your overall daily intake, and moderate if managing potassium.

TOAST IS THE NEW QUICK DINNER

Toast has officially been reimagined as a full meal, especially in the summer, when turning on the stove feels like too much. It's no longer just a side or snack, but a blank canvas for building something balanced and satisfying.

With the right combination of whole grain or lower-sodium bread, a protein-rich spread, and fresh toppings, toast can easily deliver the nutrients you need in one simple, no-cook dish.

Not-So Green Goddess Toast

Creamy without relying on avocado

**What you need:**

Bread (white, sourdough, or a low-protein specialty)
Mashed white beans
Herbs (parsley, chives)
Cucumber slices
Radish slices
Lemon juice

Spread mashed beans on toasted bread and top with

chopped herbs, cucumber and radish slices and a squeeze of lemon. Choose lower-sodium breads and be mindful of portion sizes with higher-potassium toppings.

Berry and Chicken Toast

Unexpected but really works, balanced and refreshing for a hot evening

**What you need:**

Bread (white, sourdough, or a low-protein specialty)
Shredded chicken
Fresh berries
Light drizzle of honey
Black pepper

Gently mix shredded chicken and berries, layer on toast and top with light drizzle of honey and black pepper.

Endless Open-Face Toast Options

Light-mayo egg salad + fresh dill + cracked pepper + leafy greens

Ricotta + sliced strawberries + drizzle of honey

Shredded chicken + sliced fresh peach + torn basil + drizzle of olive oil

Plain yogurt or cream cheese + cucumber ribbons + smoked salmon + dill

Fresh mozzarella (small amount) + tomato + basil + olive oil

Sliced leftover roast turkey + small smear of kidney-friendly chutney + mustard greens

CHILLED SWEET TREATS

When the heat lingers, desserts can stay refreshing and satisfying without leaning on the oven at all. Chilled and frozen options focus on layering, freezing, and light preparation to keep things simple and kidney-friendly.

Try frozen berry yogurt bark, where a thin layer of yogurt is spread out, topped with fresh berries, and frozen until crisp, or chilled peach and ricotta cups that combine sweet ripe fruit with creamy ricotta for a softly indulgent finish. These treats highlight natural flavours and rely on minimal added sugar while keeping sodium in check. With an emphasis on fresh ingredients, gentle sweetness, and easy preparation, they offer a cooling alternative that still feels like a thoughtful, comforting dessert.

Chilled Peach and Ricotta Cups

Creamy, light and easy to prepare



What you need:

- 2 peaches
- ½ cup ricotta cheese (drained if too watery)
- 1–2 Tbsp honey or pure maple syrup
- ¼ tsp vanilla extract
- Pinch of lemon zest (optional)
- 1 Tbsp chopped walnuts

Cut peaches in half and remove the pits. Use a melon baller or spoon to gently scoop out a small well in the center of each half to create room for the filling. Place them in the refrigerator to chill for at least 30 minutes.

In a medium bowl, vigorously whisk or whip the ricotta cheese with the honey, vanilla extract, and lemon zest until it reaches a smooth, creamy consistency. Cover and place in the fridge until chilled.

Remove the chilled peaches and the ricotta from the refrigerator. Spoon a generous dollop of the ricotta mixture

into the hollow center of each peach half. Sprinkle the chopped walnuts between the four halves. Drizzle with a little extra honey if desired. Serve chilled.

Frozen Yogurt Lemon Bark

Cool, tangy, and feels indulgent but stays light



What you need:

- 1 cup plain or vanilla Greek yogurt
- 1 Tbsp honey or maple syrup
- Zest of 1 lemon
- ¼ cup sliced strawberries or blueberries

Mix yogurt, honey or maple syrup, and lemon zest. Spread onto a parchment-lined tray (about ½ inch thick). Sprinkle berries on top. Freeze for 2–3 hours until firm. Break into pieces and serve frozen.

2-Ingredient Popsicles

Blend until smooth 1 cup pineapple with ½ cup water or 1 cup Greek yogurt with 1 cup strawberries. Freeze in popsicles molds for an upscale take on a classic summer treat.



1. Easy Labels



Painters or kitchen tape is inexpensive and peels off containers easily. One roll will last for ages.

2. Clear Containers



Clear containers and bins make it easy to see what you have at a glance, helping reduce food waste.

3. Make Less, Waste Less



Cook smaller portions or repurpose leftovers into a new meal so it doesn't feel repetitive.

Let Your Fridge Do the Work

For no-cook, kidney-friendly meals in the summer, have a fast, fresh, and fridge first approach.

A clean, organized fridge sets us up to make better food choices. Start by clearing everything out and discarding expired or spoiled items, then wipe down shelves and drawers with warm water and mild soap or vinegar.

With a fridge built around ready-to-eat ingredients, putting together balanced, kidney-conscious meals becomes less about cooking and more about combining what's already on hand. Use these quick tips to make your fridge work for you.

Group Foods

Organize shelves by food groups and purpose: keep ready-to-eat items like washed vegetables, cut fruit, and cooked grains at eye level so they're the first thing you see, and store proteins in a designated spot to make meal assembly faster. Place higher-sodium condiments or processed foods out of immediate reach.

Track Freshness Daily

Keep washed and chopped vegetables like cucumbers, lettuce, peppers, and carrots ready to go, along with a few fruits such as berries, apples, or grapes for easy sides. Checking freshness daily helps to keep produce at the top of mind.



A Little Prep Goes a Long Way

Hard-boiled eggs can last up to one week in the fridge. Boil and store in a clear container at the start of the week for quick protein. Shredded rotisserie chicken (skin removed) can last 3-4 days. Having a plan for leftovers turn last night's roast veggies into a frittata, rice into fried rice, chicken into tacos. People are far more likely to eat

leftovers when they feel like a new meal.

Store Easy Flavour Boosts on the Door

The fridge door is prime real estate for adding quick, kidney-friendly flavour to no-cook meals. Stock it with simple, low-sodium staples that can instantly lift flavour with little effort. When these small finishers are within reach, assembling a meal becomes less about what's missing and more about how easily you can bring everything together.

- Lemon or lime juice for brightness
- Dijon or whole grain mustard (low-sodium)
- Plain yogurt for quick creamy dressings (mix in fresh herbs + lemon juice, garlic paste + grated cucumber, or cinnamon + a drizzle of honey + vanilla for a fruit dip)
- Low-sodium homemade dressings
- Hot sauce (used lightly) for heat

Quick Weekly Reset

At the end of each week, toss what's no longer fresh, wipe shelves, and restock staples so your fridge stays a practical, easy-to-use space rather than something you have to dig through.

When the Call Comes

“Life is a game of dodgeball. You either hit the obstacles or you miss them — but they keep coming.”

Janet Hutchingame

Contributors: Andrea Rudy and Ranj Woods, RSW

When she received the call in 2006 that her husband, Ken, had been diagnosed with stage 3 kidney disease, her first reaction wasn't fear. It was relief. For months, no one could explain why he was so unwell. Doctors

suspected cancer. They ran tests, then more tests. Nothing fit.

“He finally had an answer,” Janet Hutchingame shared recently to The Kidney Foundation. “He said, ‘Okay, now we know what it is.

What’s the treatment? What do we do next?’”

For Ken, the diagnosis meant clarity. For Janet, it meant stepping into a role she never expected: care partner, advocate, and eventually, widow.

A Family History Written in Loss

Kidney disease wasn't new to Ken's family. His mother died at 56 from complications of kidney and heart failure. Two of his sisters also lived with kidney disease — one diagnosed at age eight, another in her thirties. Both passed away in their early sixties.

"They never got answers," Janet says. "It was always, 'It could be this, or it could be that.' They didn't know how to advocate for themselves."

"You can't advocate for yourself if you don't know how."

Both sisters were neurodivergent, which added another layer of complexity. Navigating the healthcare system is hard even for those who know how to push back. For those who can't, it can be nearly impossible.

Advocacy Barriers

Patients who struggle with communication, cognitive load, or systemic bias often receive delayed diagnoses. A strong care partner or advocate can make a life changing difference.

Ken was different. He asked questions. He pushed. He insisted on clarity. And eventually, that persistence led to his diagnosis — and to the transplant he received in 2012. For 12 years, his transplanted

Why Diagnosis Can Bring Both Relief and Fear

A clear diagnosis can feel grounding after months of uncertainty. It gives families a direction, a plan, and language for what's happening. But it also marks the beginning of a long journey — one that can be emotionally overwhelming. Both reactions are normal.

kidney served him well. But in 2024, complications from heart disease emerged — the same pattern seen in his mother. Ken passed away in September of that year.

The Impact on Families: The Part No One Talks About

When Ken was first diagnosed, their youngest daughter was still very young. "She thought her dad was dying," Janet says. "She was terrified. And there was no support for her."

There was support for Ken — medical teams, information binders, transplant coordinators. But for the family? Very little. This is a common gap. Care partners often carry the emotional weight of the illness while trying to stay strong for everyone else. Children, especially, can feel lost in the swirl of medical language and adult worry.

"We're missing support for families," Janet says. "Not just the patient. Everyone around them."

After Loss: The Second Year Is Harder

Grief doesn't follow a timeline. It doesn't end at 12 months. It doesn't fade neatly. "The first year is hard," Janet says. "But the second year is harder. Everyone else moves on. But

After the Appointments Stop

For many caregivers and families, the first year after loss still carries familiar routines, phone calls, paperwork, anniversaries, and support from others.

The second year can feel quieter, and at times lonelier, as those connections lessen and the reality of life without their loved one settles in. Grief during this time is not a step backward; it is often part of adjusting to a profound change.

Ask your renal social worker about grief support resources available to family members.

What Families Need

- Clear, age appropriate information
- Emotional support for children and spouses
- Guidance on navigating the healthcare system
- Space to grieve the "small losses" that happen long before death

you don't."

People often expect grief to resolve after the first anniversary. But for many, the second year brings a deeper, quieter ache — the shock has worn off, but the absence is permanent.

"I had 30 some years with this man," she says. "I can't just move on. He moves forward with me."

Small Things That Make a Hard Day Bearable

Janet doesn't pretend every day is positive. She doesn't believe in forced optimism. "Not every day is good," she says. "And positivity doesn't help someone who's having a really bad day." What helped her — and what she encourages others to try — are small, manageable acts of care.

"You need something to laugh at or smile at," Janet says. "Just something to make you feel better for a little while."

The Binder That Became Their Bible

When Ken was first diagnosed, The Kidney Foundation gave them a binder.

"We went through it from front to back," Janet says. "It had every question we had. It was our Bible."

Later, the website made information even more accessible. But that binder — tangible, organized, reassuring — was their anchor in the early days.

After retiring, Janet began volunteering with The Kidney Foundation, helping with mailings

How to Advocate for Yourself or a Loved One

- Ask questions — even the ones that feel “silly.”
- Bring someone with you to appointments.
- Keep a notebook or binder of symptoms, medications, and questions.
- Reach out to patient support groups early.
- Don't be afraid to push for clarity.

and events. She wanted to give back to the organization that helped her family so much. She also became a strong advocate for kidney disease to be recognized as a chronic disease across Canada — with standardized care and better support for families.

Moving Forward, Not Moving On

Janet's story is one of love, loss, resilience, and advocacy. It's a reminder that care partners carry their own invisible journey — one that deserves recognition, support, and compassion.

“We have our good days and our bad days,” she says. “We get through the bad days by finding something positive — even something small — to help us get to the next day.”

Her message to other care partners and grieving families is simple, honest, and deeply human: You don't have to be okay all the time. You don't have to move on. You just have to keep moving forward, one day at a time.

Families navigating serious illness or loss can benefit from dedicated grief and bereavement supports. A number of organizations provide counselling, and grief support groups tailored to different ages and experiences.

These resources can help individuals process loss, build coping strategies, and find connection with others facing similar challenges, providing comfort and guidance during difficult times.

Kidney Foundation Resources

The Kidney Foundation offers easy to understand information about kidney disease, treatment options, dialysis, transplant, and living well with chronic kidney conditions. Families can explore guides, FAQs, and printable resources to help make sense of the journey.

Peer Support Program

Families, care partners, and patients can connect with trained volunteers who have lived experience with kidney disease. Peer support is available by phone, online, or in group settings, offering a safe space to talk with someone who truly understands.

Financial Support Programs

The BC and Yukon Branch provides short-term financial assistance to cover emergency expenses related to kidney disease — including travel costs and access to home dialysis training — so care and treatment are not compromised. This can alleviate stress as patients and families navigate life changes due to kidney disease.

Transplant and Organ Donation Information

Clear, accessible information about the transplant process, living donation, and how families can prepare or learn more. This can help reduce fear and uncertainty around major medical decisions.



Advocacy and Policy Updates

Families can stay informed about national kidney health initiatives, chronic disease policy, and opportunities to get involved in advocacy efforts — including the push for standardized kidney care across Canada.

Mental Wellbeing Support

Mental wellness is affected by our life experiences and daily activities. The Kidney Wellness Hub offers a number of resources, on-demand videos, and weekly online classes that help us alleviate stress and take steps towards dealing with feelings of depression and grief. These opportunities are open to patients, caregivers, family members, and anyone in need of support. Visit kidneywellnesshub.ca to learn more.



Daughters Allison, Jennifer, Caitlin (left to right) at Jennifer's wedding, September 10, 2019

When a Parent Has Kidney Disease — Support for Kids and Teens

Watching a parent go through kidney disease can be confusing and scary. Kids and teens often feel the weight of the illness long before they have the words to describe it. Here are a few gentle reminders for young people navigating a parent's health journey.

1. You're allowed to feel however you feel

Worried, angry, sad, confused, numb — all of these feelings are normal. There's no "right way" to react when someone you love is sick.

2. Ask questions — even the big ones

Kids and teens deserve clear, honest information. If something doesn't make sense, ask a parent, doctor, nurse, or social worker to explain it in a way that feels right for your age.

3. You don't have to be the strong one

It's not your job to fix anything. You don't have to hide your feelings to protect your parent. Sharing how you feel can actually help everyone.

4. Find someone you trust to talk to

A teacher, counsellor, coach, aunt, uncle, grandparent, or friend. Talking to someone outside the home can make things feel less heavy.

5. Do small things that help you feel like yourself

Draw, play music, go for a walk, watch something funny, play a game, read, or spend time with friends. These aren't distractions — they're ways to stay grounded.

6. It's okay to take breaks from the hard stuff

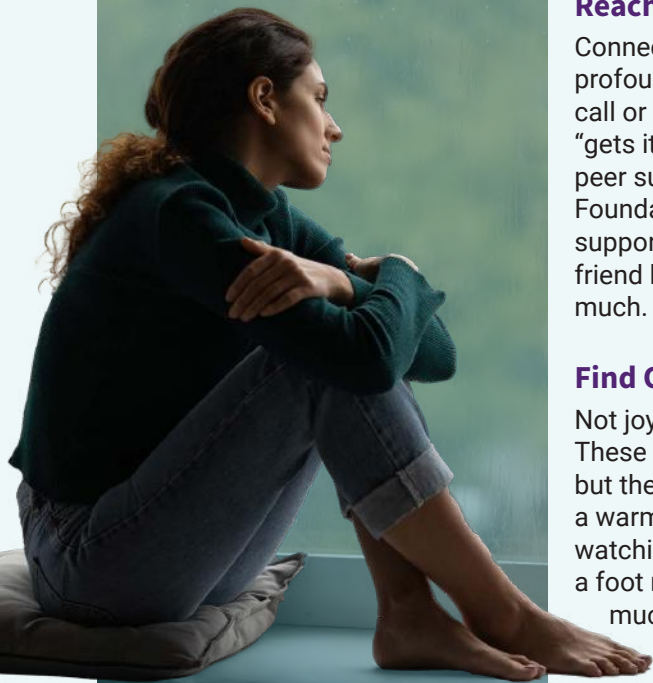
You're allowed to laugh. You're allowed to have fun. You're allowed to be a kid or a teen, even during difficult times.

7. You're not alone

Many young people go through this, even if it feels like you're the only one. Support groups, school counsellors, and community programs can help you feel less isolated.

Mini Guide: Gentle Ways to Get Through a Hard Day

These suggestions come from Janet's lived experience and social work best practices. They're meant to be simple, realistic, and doable, even when you're feeling overwhelmed.



"Just knowing someone else feels the same way can help," Janet says.

Change Your Scenery, Even Slightly

A shift in environment can interrupt spiraling thoughts. Step outside for five minutes or sit in a different room. Even moving your chair near a window can help.

"A different perspective helps you breathe again," Janet says.

Let Yourself Feel What You Feel

You don't have to be strong all the time. Suppressing emotions increases stress. Naming them reduces it. Cry if you need to, and say out loud, "This is hard." Give yourself permission to have a bad day.

Reach Out, Even Briefly

Connection doesn't have to be deep or profound. It can be a quick, five-minute call or a simple text to someone who "gets it." Have a conversation with a peer support volunteer (The Kidney Foundation offers a one-on-one peer support program). Sitting quietly with a friend helps, when conversation is too much.

Find One Small Comfort

Not joy. Not happiness. Just comfort. These small comforts don't fix the day, but they soften the edges. It could be a warm drink and favourite snack or watching a silly TV show. Give yourself a foot massage, and if that is too much effort, a soft blanket or warm shower can help.

Break the Day Into Pieces

When the whole day feels impossible, shrink it. Focus on the next hour, the next task, or simply the next breath.

"Just take it one day at a time," Janet recommends. "Sometimes it's one moment at a time."

Keep a Tiny Positive Anchor

Not forced positivity — just one thing that helps you stay tethered. Anchors help you feel less adrift.

- A photo or quote
- A memory
- A small goal, like stepping outside once a day

Ask for Help Before You Think You Deserve It

Care partners often wait too long to ask for support. You don't have to earn support. You already deserve it.

- Ask someone to pick up groceries for you
- Ask a nurse to explain something again
- Ask a friend to sit with you
- Ask a social worker for resources

You don't have to carry grief alone. Many caregivers and family members are used to focusing on everyone else's needs while setting aside their own.

After a loss, it can feel difficult to ask for help or accept support. But grief is not something you have to 'earn' support for. Your pain, exhaustion, and adjustment are valid, and connecting with others can be an important part of the healing.

Hard Days Don't Mean You're Failing

A bad day is not a setback. It's part of the process. Even on your hardest days, simply showing up is a quiet form of strength.

"It's okay to not be okay," Janet says. "You'll get through it. But you don't have to pretend."



Contributor: Michelle Hampson

A NEW Era in Kidney Care

The Promise of SGLT2 Inhibitors for the Future of Kidney Disease Treatment

There are many causes of kidney disease, which is a complex condition that often worsens over time. The best treatment involves detecting it early and taking steps slow or stop disease progression. Until recently, the only options people had to slow kidney disease progression involved lifestyle changes and a small handful of medications, such as RAS inhibitors. While these approaches can be useful, people now have an additional tool to help preserve kidney health: a class of medication called SGLT2 inhibitors.

SGLT2 inhibitors were first developed to treat people with type 2 diabetes. However, initial studies in people with type 2 diabetes hinted that these medications may not only improve cardiovascular health, but kidney health as well.

This prompted researchers to launch a series of studies exploring the effects of SGLT2 inhibitors in people with kidney disease. The results have

been remarkable, showing that SGLT2 inhibitors can lower a person's risk of kidney failure by about 30 to 40%. What's more, the medications can significantly lower people's risk of heart complications.

"SGLT2 inhibitors are one of the most exciting advances the kidney community has seen in decades," says Dr. Adeera Levin, a nephrologist and executive director of BC Renal. "These medications will help many patients live dialysis-free for longer periods of time, and with better heart health. They are a gamechanger in terms of preventative medicine."

SGLT2 inhibitors have shown a number of other benefits for kidney patients, including lower weight and blood pressure, fewer kidney stones, and an increase in hemoglobin (a protein in our red blood cells that helps carry oxygen).

While the medications have shown many benefits, they do not have a lot of side effects and have been found

to be very safe in people with chronic kidney disease.

Before beginning any medication, it's important to speak with your doctor and make sure it's an appropriate therapy given your unique circumstances and health status.

Research on SGLT2 inhibitors is still ongoing, and studies have not yet explored this type of medication in certain subsets of kidney disease, including in people with: autosomal dominant polycystic disease, type 1 diabetes, antineutrophil cytoplasmic autoantibody-associated vasculitis, lupus nephritis, and patients with solid organ transplants. However, all of these populations are being studied in trials.

For millions of people living around the world with kidney disease, the emergence of SGLT2 inhibitors offers a new and effective way to preserve kidney health – allowing them to delay or avoid difficult treatments like dialysis, and live life more fully.

Your Summer Playlist

A Simple Tool for Better Health

Contributor: Janelle Miller, BMT, MTA



Listening to music is a simple, accessible activity that can offer meaningful health benefits for people living with kidney disease.

Music has many science-backed benefits, from boosting mood and cognition to relieving pain and improving memory.

For people living with kidney disease, music can be especially helpful. Whether it's calming music during dialysis, upbeat songs on a short walk, or relaxing playlists before bed, it can reduce stress, lift mood, and create a sense of comfort during difficult days. Managing kidney disease often involves emotional and physical challenges such as anxiety, fatigue, and sleep issues. Music offers an

easy, accessible way to support overall wellbeing without requiring special equipment or physical effort. Even a few minutes of listening to favourite songs can help you feel more relaxed, connected, and motivated.

How Background Music Supports Kidney Health

Listening to music can help lower blood pressure—a key contributor to kidney damage. Calm background music may lower cortisol (the stress hormone), slow heart rate, and promote relaxation. These effects can support cardiovascular stability and may help slow kidney disease progression, particularly when high blood pressure

is a factor. Listening during rest or before sleep can be especially beneficial.

Because music is a highly personal experience, there is no single "best" type of music for everyone. Research in music therapy consistently shows that a person's preferred music is often the most effective choice. While quiet instrumental music may help one person feel calm, it may increase stress or discomfort for another due to personal associations, memories, or experiences. Similarly, upbeat music may be energizing for some people but calming and regulating for others. Some commonly suggested options for relaxation include:

Did you know?

Just 10 minutes in the morning and 10–20 minutes before bed of meditation music will help lower stress, improve sleep, and support overall kidney-friendly health habits.

- Soft instrumental music (piano, strings, acoustic)
- Nature sounds (rain, ocean waves, birdsong)
- Ambient or slower-tempo music (often around 60–80 beats per min)
- Low-volume background music

Research also suggests that a process called entrainment may occur, where the body's rhythms, such as heart rate and breathing, gradually synchronize with the tempo of music. For this reason, slower music may support relaxation for some individuals, while music with a faster tempo may promote alertness or energy.

Tip: Choose music that you personally find enjoyable, comforting, or relaxing. Pay attention to how different types of music affect your mood, heart rate, and overall sense of wellbeing.

Improves Sleep Quality

Sleep challenges are common for people with kidney disease, including insomnia and restless sleep.

Background music can help you fall asleep faster, improve sleep depth, and reduce nighttime anxiety. Better sleep also supports immune function and hormonal balance, which are important for managing chronic conditions.

Supports Mental Health

Kidney disease often brings emotional strain due to long-term treatment, fatigue, and lifestyle changes. Music, whether facilitated by a certified music therapist, or simple listening, can reduce anxiety, ease depression, and improve motivation.

Thoughtfully chosen songs or narrated stories can also help reduce awareness of physical strain, creating a more positive and calming atmosphere. Consider building a mix of relaxing music, ambient sounds, or enjoyable audiobooks to help make longer sessions feel less burdensome and more restorative.

This is especially helpful during dialysis, which can feel long and physically draining. Having engaging content can make a real difference, helping the time pass more easily and making the experience more manageable.

The Afternoon Dip

In the late afternoon, natural energy levels often drop, leading to tiredness and reduced focus. Listening to preferred music can help counter this by stimulating the brain and boosting mood through the release of feel-good chemicals like dopamine. This can increase alertness and motivation without relying on caffeine or snacks.

When energy dips, it's common to reach for quick fixes like coffee or

Music during dinner prep can lift your mood and turn cooking into an enjoyable, energizing routine instead of a chore.

salty foods. While these may provide short-term relief, excessive caffeine can affect hydration, and high-sodium choices can increase blood pressure. Music offers a simple, risk-free alternative to lift energy and shift your mood.

Make Cooking Feel Easier

Playing preferred music while preparing dinner can make cooking feel less like a chore and more enjoyable. The rhythm creates a sense of momentum, helping you stay active and engaged, which makes it more likely you'll cook at home rather than choose takeout or processed options.

Your mood during meal prep also influences your food choices. When tired or stressed, you may gravitate toward convenient, highly processed foods. When music lifts your mood, you're more likely to prepare balanced meals with fresh ingredients, supporting healthier habits over time.

Music can also help you stay present while cooking, improving focus and portion awareness. When the experience feels positive rather than exhausting, it often carries over into greater satisfaction with your meal and less tendency to overeat or snack later.

A Small Habit with Meaningful Impact

Playing music in the afternoon—especially during dinner prep—is a simple habit that can replace less healthy coping strategies, improve motivation, and support better daily choices. Over time, these small shifts can contribute to healthier routines and improved overall wellbeing.

Kidney Magazine's Summer Playlist

Contributor

Song

Pink Pony Club by Chappell Roan

I love this song's message of self-acceptance and being confident to follow your dreams.
Dominique

Count on Me by Bruno Mars

So catchy, and it's a great song on themes of friendship, support and loyalty!
Kelly

Fresh Eyes by Andy Grammer

This reminds me that we can't change everything, but we can change how we see it.
Teresa

The Boys of Summer by Don Henley

This upbeat tune is perfect for cruising down the highway.
Owen

Riptide by Vance Joy

This is a classic in my books! It's an upbeat song that lifts your spirits.
Trinity

Beautiful Kauai by Don Ho

My Grandpa sang this to me. I always picture a perfect Hawaiian sunset when I hear it.
Melissa

Hoppípolla by Sigur Rós

I love how this track showcases immense soundscapes and deeply resonant emotions.
David

Let It Be by The Beatles

My dad and I love to karaoke to this song! It reminds me to let go of what I can't control.
Yash

Dive by Olivia Dean

Last summer, I joined a choir and singing this song together was pure joy.
Stephanie

Can't Stop the Feeling' by Justin Timberlake

An upbeat song that lifts your mood—let go, stay positive, and just dance.
Kate

Better Together by Jack Johnson

This song always reminds me of road trips, windows down, singing along.
Patricia

Don't Stop Believin' by Journey

This song never gets old. I still love singing along to it as much as I did when I was a kid.
Alisha

A Lovely Day by Bill Withers

My sister and I drove to Alberta singing this at the top of our lungs—always makes me smile.
Pia

Here Comes the Sun by The Beatles

I can't imagine my summer playlist without this classic.
Marie

We asked our Branch staff to share what songs bring them joy for our summer playlist.



Music-based exercise is a simple, low-effort way to stay active while still supporting circulation, heart health, and overall kidney health.

Move to the Music

For people living with kidney disease, energy levels can fluctuate, and fatigue can make traditional exercise feel out of reach. In these moments, short bursts of movement can be far more manageable—while still offering meaningful benefits. Even 5–10 minutes of gentle activity can help improve circulation, support heart health, and reduce stiffness, especially for those who may spend more time resting. Over time, these small, consistent efforts can also boost mood, reduce stress, and improve overall endurance.

When the weather warms up, there can be added pressure to suddenly become more active. But if structured workouts feel overwhelming, a simpler

approach can make all the difference. A “2 songs a day” movement habit is exactly what it sounds like: put on two songs—on the radio, YouTube, or your favourite playlist—and move your body for the duration. That’s it. No equipment, no schedule, and no expectations beyond showing up for those few minutes.

This low barrier approach is especially helpful on low energy days. Music naturally shifts the focus away from effort and toward enjoyment. A steady beat helps set a comfortable pace without overthinking, while familiar or favourite songs can lift mood and motivation. Instead of focusing on how long or how hard you’re exercising, your attention moves to the rhythm—making it easier to get started and stick with it.

Let the music guide you. Slow songs can pair with gentle stretches or seated movements; mid tempo songs work well for marching in place or light steps; faster songs can encourage easy dancing or larger arm movements. Adjust everything to how your body feels—there’s no need to keep up with the tempo.

This flexible routine can be done indoors or outside and can become a simple, consistent way to support kidney health through everyday movement. Think of it as a baseline: two songs, a few minutes, and a routine that fits into almost any day.

Making Music Accessible

Don’t have a stereo or surround sound system? That’s okay—cost doesn’t have to be a barrier to using music for movement or relaxation. Affordable options can still provide a great listening experience. Simple over-ear or in-ear headphones help create a more immersive environment by reducing background noise and enhancing focus on calming or uplifting sounds.

Lightweight portable speakers are another easy option, especially if you prefer not to wear headphones, filling a room with steady, supportive audio. A smartphone can also do the job well, making it easy to organize playlists for motivation, stress relief, or winding down.

By turning everyday moments into opportunities for movement, music becomes more than entertainment—it becomes a simple, powerful tool for supporting your body and kidney health.

Tips for Best Results to Get Moving

- **Consistency matters more than duration; even 5–10 minutes helps**
- **Keep volume at a moderate level; too loud can increase stress**
- **If mobility is a factor, tapping feet and moving arms from a chair still provide positive benefits**
- **Choose music that inspires you to get moving**



Avery was born with kidney disease, and while she and her family are managing her life exceptionally well, she and her grandfather both know this isn't the case for all families affected.



A Story

Contributor: Deborah Tucker

of Courage, Compassion, and Hope

BC resident and author, Alister Mathieson, together with his granddaughter, Avery, have co-authored a heartfelt and inspiring children's book, *Kaylee and Koru and the Long Way Home*.

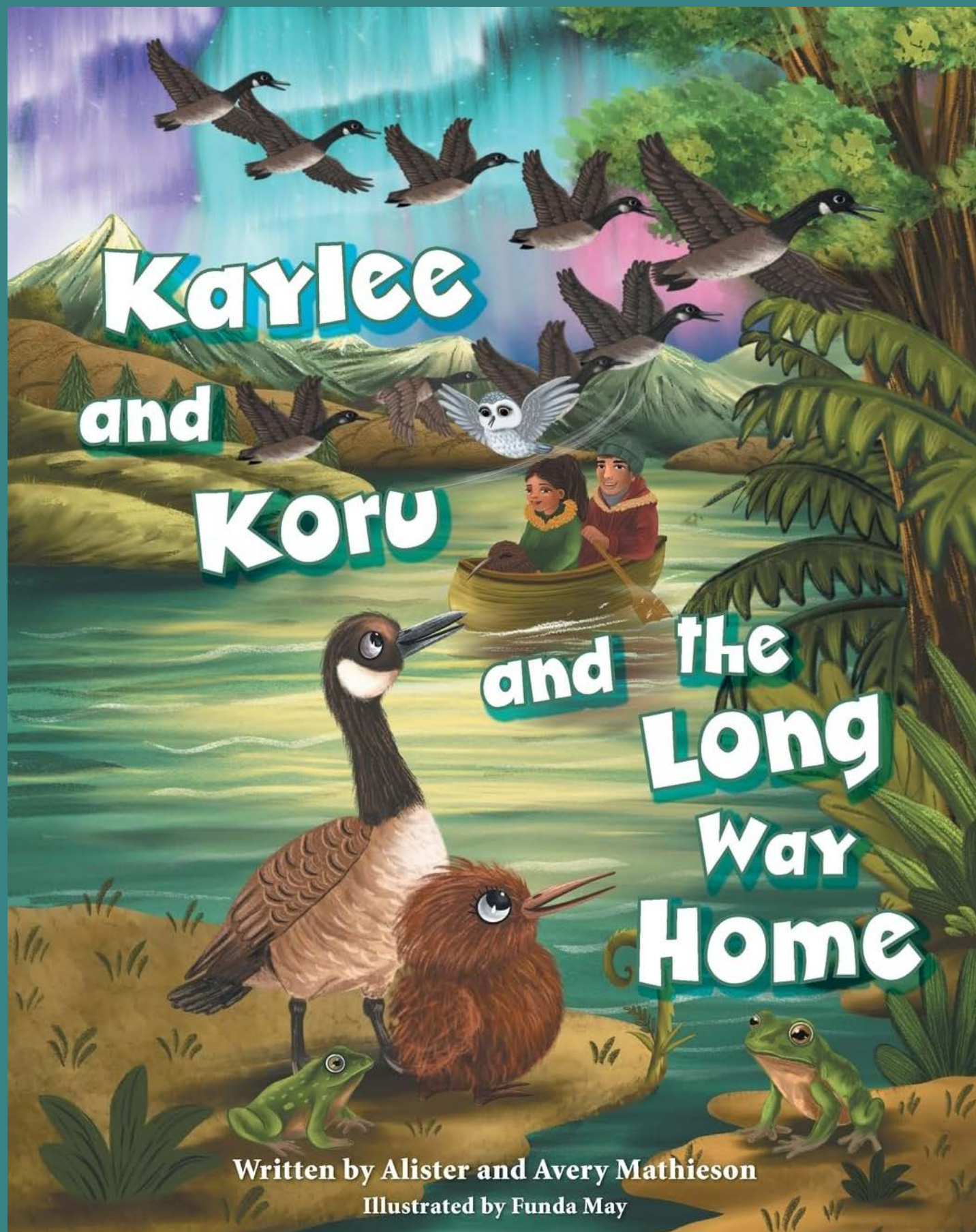
The story follows Kaylee, a Canada goose from Nunavut, whose family is caught in a tornado while migrating south to Mexico. Separated from her family, Kaylee is swept all the way to the quarry forests of New Zealand, where she meets a young kiwi named Koru. Together, they embark on a journey that reveals adventure, friendship, and a powerful message of courage, compassion, and hope.

"Avery has always been a creative and passionate young lady. She loves to draw. She loves to read and so I said to her one day, why don't you write a book with me?"

But their story was about more than just writing a book — it was about providing hope and giving back.

Avery was born with kidney disease, and while she and her family are managing her life exceptionally well, she and her grandfather both know this isn't the case for all families affected by kidney disease.

This heartwarming journey blends adventure, culture, and nature, reminding readers that friendships have no boundaries, and the world is richer when we embrace its differences.



"We talked about how lucky we are and that it's important to help others," noted Alister. "This is when we decided we were going to donate all the royalties and all the proceeds from the book to The Kidney Foundation.

"This has been a special project for me in so many ways. I am so proud of Avery. To me, this young lady is always demonstrating courage and compassion."

We decided it was important to help other people impacted by kidney disease."

"I know what it's like to live with kidney disease. I've had it all my life. It's why I want to help others like me and give them hope," adds Avery. "I loved writing this book with my grandfather and making these awesome characters, Kaylee and Koru. I hope these birds bring a smile to other kids like they do to me."

Alister and Avery also gave their time and support to The Kidney Foundation's Kidney Walk in Abbotsford this past June – the



Alister and Avery reviewing book proofs

Foundation's largest fundraising event. Alister shared why being at the Kidney Walk was important to him, and why writing a book with Avery was a touching tribute to his own granddaughter's journey with kidney disease. It was also a meaningful gift to families walking a similar path.

"I had the chance to meet so many great people from my community. It was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our collective efforts while shining a brighter light on kidney disease."

Kaylee and Koru and the Long Way Home is available for purchase at

Amazon Canada or through the QR code (below).



Proceeds from book sales support The Kidney Foundation of Canada.

Alister (right) and Avery (centre) with left to right: her brother Benji, parents Brianne and Mark, and Aunt Anne





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