



# Talking With Patients About Cardiovascular-Kidney-Metabolic (CKM) Health

## Why Talk to Patients About CKM Health?

**CKM syndrome is not simply a diagnosis. It is a continuum of interconnected cardiovascular, kidney, and metabolic risk factors that often progress silently.**

If we do not talk to patients about CKM health early, we risk not meeting them until later in progression, after a major health event and/or after organ damage has already taken place.

**Conversations about CKM health help patients understand:**

- How their conditions are connected
- Where they are on the CKM syndrome spectrum
- What can be done now to slow progression or even promote regression

## THE 3 Cs - CONNECT. CHECK. CUSTOMIZE.

Provide a simple structure for these conversations.

### CONNECT



#### Connect Systems and Conditions

#### Why it matters:

Patients often think of their conditions as separate problems:

- “I have high blood pressure.”
- “My blood sugar is a little high.”
- “My kidney function is low.”

Without understanding interconnectivity, they may underestimate risk.

CKM syndrome progression occurs when metabolic risk factors, impaired kidney function or kidney damage, and cardiovascular stress amplify each other over time.

#### When patients understand that:

- Hypertension can damage blood vessels of the heart and kidneys
- Impaired blood flow adversely affects kidney function and structure
- Kidney dysfunction further increases cardiovascular risk
- Diabetes and/or metabolic dysfunction can increase both kidney and cardiovascular disease risk

They are more likely to see the value in comprehensive management.

#### HOW TO SAY IT:

“Your heart, kidneys, and metabolic health (the way your body creates, uses and stores energy) work together as one system. When one is under stress, the others are affected too.”

This shifts the conversation from treatment of one organ in isolation to comprehensive system-level prevention.

## CHECK



### Check the Risk & Stage

#### Why it matters:

CKM syndrome progresses in stages. Early stages may represent risk factors without symptoms. Later stages reflect more severe organ damage or clinical events.

#### Patients may need help understanding:

- What their numbers mean
- What stage of CKM syndrome they are currently in
- Whether their condition is progressing, regressing, or stabilizing

#### Without grounding the conversation in data, risk can feel abstract.

#### When you review:

- Lipid panel
- Blood pressure
- A1C
- eGFR
- Urine albumin to creatinine ratio (UACR)
- BMI/waist circumference

You are defining CKM syndrome stage and trajectory.

#### Early detection allows earlier intervention that can:

- Slow progression and promote regression of CKM syndrome
- Prevent permanent kidney damage
- Lower cardiovascular disease risk

#### HOW TO SAY IT:

“Let’s look at these numbers together. They tell us where you are right now and provide a starting point for us to talk through overall health goals and any changes that may be needed to achieve them.”

This reinforces shared understanding of risk and shared decision-making.

## CUSTOMIZE



### Customize a Care Plan with Patients

#### Why it matters:

CKM progression is not inevitable.

With the right therapies, lifestyle support, and team-based care, stabilization and regression is possible — particularly in earlier stages.

#### Customizing care means matching treatment and management to:

#### The best plan matches:

- The stage of CKM syndrome
- The highest-impact risk drivers
- The patient’s goals
- The realities of access and affordability

Patients are more likely to engage when the plan feels realistic and aligned with their priorities.

#### HOW TO SAY IT:

“Given where you are right now, and what matters most to you, what would make the biggest difference for you? Let’s work together on a plan to achieve this so you can keep living a long and healthy life.”

This transforms directive management to collaborative.

## The Clinical Imperative



### CKM health conversations are important because:

- Risk compounds silently
- Staging determines urgency
- Early intervention changes trajectory
- Patients cannot manage what they do not understand
- Inaction may result in progression and worse outcomes

### And are engaged in care planning, including:

- What matters most to them
- What worries them the most
- What barriers might get in the way
- Which options fit or work best for them

**They are more likely to take ownership of their treatment goals.**

### When patients understand:

- The connection
- Their stage
- Their options
- The resources available

For CKM Health Patient Resources, visit: [heart.org/myckmhealth](https://heart.org/myckmhealth)

## The 20-Second Clinical Summary

Talk about CKM health to:



### Connect the systems

so patients see the whole picture.



### Check the stage

so risk is clear and measurable.



### Customize the plan

so progression can be stopped or reversed.

***CKM health conversations help make risk understandable and make prevention actionable.***

[heart.org/CKMHprofessional](https://heart.org/CKMHprofessional)