



QUESTIONS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ANSWERS

Kidney Failure

What Kidneys Do

You have two kidneys. They are located at the waistline in your back. They keep your blood clean. They also do other things. They:

- rid the blood of excess waste and fluid
- help control blood pressure
- make chemicals, called hormones (hor-mones) that help make red blood cells and strengthen bones
- balance chemicals like potassium, sodium, and chloride that muscles need to work right

Kidney Failure

When the kidneys fail they cannot get rid of body wastes and fluids. This causes swelling in the hands and feet. It increases blood pressure. The body cannot make enough red blood cells. Muscles may cramp.

Healthy kidneys work at 100 percent. Serious health problems start when they are able to work at only 25 percent or less. You cannot live without treatment if your kidneys can work at only 10 to 15 percent.

Causes of Kidney Failure

Most kidney failure is due to attacks on the nephrons (nef-rons) inside your kidneys. Nephrons work like an oil filter on a car. But nephrons filter blood, not oil. Nephrons can be hurt by:

- injury caused by hitting kidneys hard
- poisons
- street drugs like cocaine

- diseases in other parts of the body

Diseases can kill nephrons slowly. There are few warning signs. Most diseases that attack kidneys, attack both at the same time. Some diseases that can cause kidney failure are:

- diabetes
- high blood pressure

- HIV/AIDS
- hepatitis
- some types of cancer

When these diseases affect the kidneys they cause the kidneys to be diseased.

Signs to Watch Out for

Everyone should know these signs of kidney failure and watch for them. This is extra important if there is a history of kidney problems in your family. In the early stages of the disease you may have few or no signs at all. If it gets worse, you may see some of these warning signs:

- need to pass water (urinate) more often
- not wanting to eat as much
- feeling itchy
- often feeling more tired
- feeling sick to the stomach or throwing up
- swelling of the hands and feet
- loss of feeling in the hands or feet
- trouble thinking clearly
- darkening of the skin
- muscle cramps
- seizures

How Doctors Check for Kidney Failure

- tests on your blood and urine
- tests that take pictures of the kidneys such as ultrasound and CT Scan (sometimes called a CAT scan)

Treatments

When kidneys fail, your doctor may advise one of the following treatments. You need to talk to your doctor about which treatment is best for you.

Peritoneal Dialysis (per-i-toe-nee-al di-al-i-sis) – In this treatment a small tube called a catheter (cath-uh-tur) is placed into your belly. A cleansing fluid is sent through the tube. After a few hours the fluid is drained along with any wastes and chemicals. This is done several times during the day and night. The treatment can be done at home as well as at a clinic.

Hemodialysis (He-mo-di-al-i-sis) – This treatment uses a machine to clean and filter your blood. Doctors place a tube under the skin in your arm. Blood travels through this tube to a filter outside your body called a dialyzer (di-a-li-zer). The dialyzer filters out wastes and extra fluid from your blood. Clean blood goes back into your body through a second set of tubes. This treatment is often done three to four times a week at a Dialysis Center. It is done by trained health care workers. Each treatment lasts 3 to 4 hours. During treatments you can watch TV, read a book, or rest.

Kidney Transplant – When a kidney transplant is done, doctors replace a failed kidney with a healthy kidney. The healthy kidney comes from another person. After surgery, your blood will flow through the new kidney. It will filter blood just like the old one did. A kidney transplant is not always a cure for kidney failure. There is a risk that your body may not accept the new kidney. Your age, race, and medical condition can affect how well a transplant works.

What You Can Do

Serious kidney disease and failure cannot be cured. If you catch it early you may make your kidneys last longer. Here is what to do:

- If you have diabetes, watch your blood sugar. Keep it under control.
- Check with your doctor before taking any medicines.
- Do not take medicines for pain that may harm your kidneys. Ask your doctor.
- Have your blood pressure checked often. Make sure it stays below 130/80.
- Eat enough protein to build up your muscles.
- Keep blood fat (cholesterol) low by cutting down on fats in your food.
- Do not smoke.
- Cut down on salt.
- Do not take street drugs.
- Do not have risky sex. You could get HIV or hepatitis. These can damage kidneys.

Things to Remember

- Your kidneys are vital organs you cannot live without. They keep your blood clean.
- Kidney disease can be slowed.
- Dialysis and transplants can help people live longer.
- Diabetes and high blood pressure are the biggest causes of kidney failure.
- Make regular appointments with your kidney doctor (nephrologist) if you have kidney disease.
- Kidney disease can also increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes.

Who to Call for More Help

American Association of Kidney Patients

3503 East Frontage Road Suite 315

Tampa, FL 33607

Phone: 1-800-749-2257

Fax: 1-813-636-8122

Email: info@aaakp.org

Website: www.aaakp.org

National Kidney Foundation

30 East 33rd Street

New York, NY 10016

Phone: 1-800-622-9010

Website: info@kidney.org

American Kidney Fund

6110 Executive Boulevard Suite 1010

Rockville, MD 20852

Phone: 1-800-638-8299

Fax: 1-301-881-0989

Websites: helpline@akfllc.org, www.akfinc.org

National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse

Information Way

Bethesda, MD 20892

Email: nkudic@info.niddk.nih.gov

Polycystic Kidney Disease Foundation

4901 Main Street Suite 200

Kansas City, MO 64112
Phone: 1-800-PKD-CURE
Fax: 1-816-937-8655
Email: pkdcure@pkdcure.org
Website: www.pkdcure.org

How can I find a Doctor?

St. Vincent Charity Hospital has doctors who have special training in kidney diseases. To contact one of our doctors call the:

Physician Referral Line at 1-800-223-8662
Visit our Web site at www.stvincentcharity.com

Our doctors serve with a deep respect for all. Their goal is to give the best care and education whether or not a person can pay.

St. Vincent Charity Hospital
2351 E. 22nd Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44115
216-861-6200
TTY: Ohio Relay 1-800-750-0750

St. Luke's Health Care Center
11201 Shaker Boulevard
Cleveland, Ohio 44104
216-721-6900

Reading Health, a program of Project:LEARN, assisted in the writing of this material under a grant from the Sisters of Charity Foundation: May 2008



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