

# Gender difference in kidney affliction

Kidney disease appears to affect men and women differently.

WHEN it comes to chronic kidney disease (CKD), women may be more likely to develop the illness than men.

According to studies by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, the average prevalence of CKD in women is 14% as opposed to 12% in men.

Interestingly, researchers also found that men were likely to go on dialysis earlier in the course of their illness compared to women, for reasons that aren't fully known.

Hospital Serdang Nephrology Department head and senior consultant nephrologist Prof Dr Goh Bak Leong, who is also the president of the Malaysian Society of Nephrology, says that there could be a variety of reasons for this, including uneven access to healthcare for women in some countries.

"While the reason is unclear why this illness affects men and women differently, it is something that has consistently been observed across the world, in both developed and developing countries," he says.

Such gaps in treatment and care are part of what organisations like the [National Kidney Foundation \(NKF\)](#) hope to address as part of its ongoing mission.

Zaedah Jali, 57, has been undergoing dialysis treatments at NKF for the past 20 years now.

Having been diagnosed with two failed kidneys at just 37, she was forced to turn to NKF after being rejected as a potential candidate for a kidney transplant.

The former factory worker now spends her days resting at home and thanking the Almighty for a fairly blissful life, as her children are all grown up and independent.

Melini Ismail's story is slightly different. Having completed her professional ACCA in Britain, Malini landed a job in a German firm, and later, TV3, as an accountant.

Then in 2012, a blood test revealed that her kidneys were not functioning the way they should. By then she already knew she had diabetes and hypertension, but was unable to proceed with the dialysis due to her work commitments.

Despite being someone who loves to travel and enjoys food, Melini has been forced to cut back on these activities since being diagnosed with CKD and commencing dialysis treatments with NKF.

"I once had a scare when I indulged in some nasi dagang and was admitted to the hospital for two days! I have since started making more effort to cook and eat healthier foods," she shares.

"The only issue I face is that when I travel I need to find areas that have dialysis centres and book my sessions in advance, and this can be cumbersome, especially overseas.

"So I have cut back on traveling tremendously, with the exception of traveling back to my hometown in Kota Bahru, which has an NKF branch," she says.

Former assistant nurse Zaliha Sis, who has been undergoing dialysis since 1978, is grateful for the assistance provided by NKF in enabling her to enjoy a better quality of life since her diagnosis.

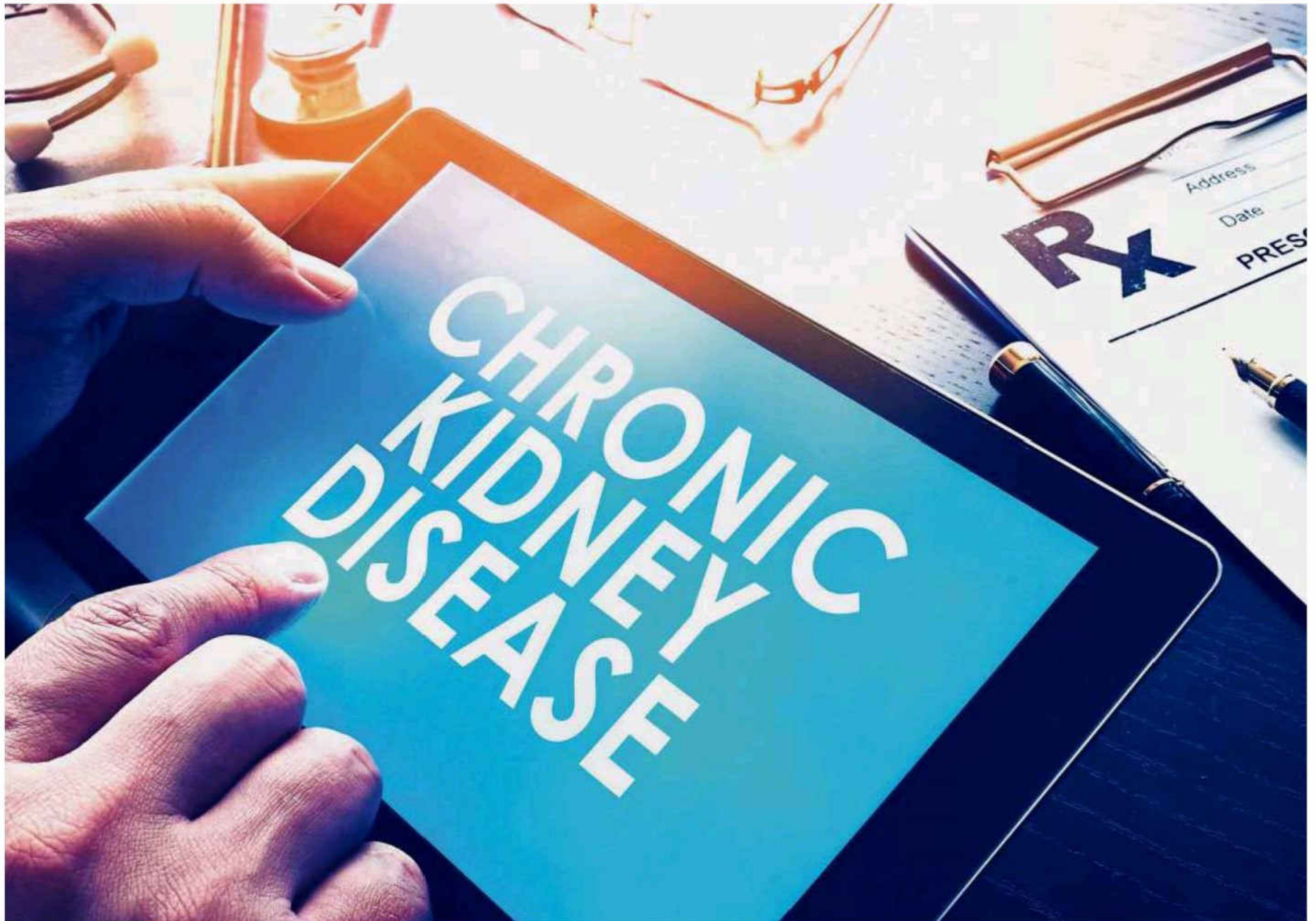
"I had the opportunity to receive a kidney from my mum in 1979, but after the surgery, my body rejected it.

"So I went back to dialysis and am not looking for another donor kidney," she said, adding that her family and her husband's family have always taken good care of her and supported her throughout her treatments.

Former factory worker Chuy Oi Lan, 63, was diagnosed with kidney failure in 1993 and has been undergoing dialysis treatment with NKF since 2012.

She also receives funding from the Social Security Organisation (Socso) for her dialysis costs.

Aside from being an end-stage renal disease (ESRD) patient, Chuy is also a breast cancer survivor. "You should never give up hope no matter how hard life is, because your family and friends will always have your back," she said.



The average prevalence of CKD in women is 14%, while in men, it is 12%. — TNS



It is possible to lead a good quality of life with kidney dialysis. — Reuters

Patients like 40-year-old Shela Devi continue to benefit from haemodialysis treatments at NKF, as her family is not well-off.

Although she is registered as a recipient for a donor kidney, she has not yet received any good news.

With no transplant in sight, she is thankful to NKF for prolonging her health and life so that she can see all her children grow up and eventually have their own families.

"I am glad that I am receiving the best possible care from NKF, whose staff members treat all patients with professionalism and take the trouble to lend their ears for us to confide in.

"Many of our concerns have been eased, and I have also benefitted from a friendly and family-like atmosphere at the centre," she says.

These women are proof that while CKD is a debilitating disease and dialysis treatments are physically and financially drain-

ing, a decent quality of life is still possible with the right treatment.

According to Prof Goh, there are a number of steps that can be taken to prevent the advance or onset of kidney disease.

These include consistent screening for kidney disease and adequately controlling blood pressure and blood sugar.

"Perhaps women need to take better care of themselves and be more proactive in seeking out treatments once they are diagnosed with the illness.

"I think oftentimes women may tend to delay their treatment due to commitments to the family and their role as a caregiver, or fear that their lifestyle could be affected as a result of the treatment.

"But this is far from the truth. If anything, the countless women who are being treated at NKF prove that it is possible to lead a good life and enjoy better quality of life once you seek the relevant treatment," he says.

## Risk factors for age-related kidney disease

Some conditions that affect the kidneys are more common as people get older.

You are more at risk of developing kidney disease if you:

- Are over 60 years of age
- Have diabetes
- Are obese
- Have high blood pressure
- Have established heart problems (heart failure or past heart attack) or have had a stroke

There are a number of things you can do to keep your kidneys healthy, including:

- If you have diabetes, make sure that your blood sugar control is excellent.

Follow your doctor's advice about insulin injections, medicines, diet, physical activity and monitoring your blood sugar.

- Control high blood pressure. Have your blood pressure checked regularly.

Drugs used to lower blood pressure (anti-hypertensive drugs), such as ACE inhibitors or angiotensin blockers, can slow the development of kidney disease.

- If you have one of the risk factors for kidney disease, have a kidney health check (blood test, urine test and blood pressure check) at least every year (more frequent if you have diabetes or high blood pressure).

- Treat urinary tract infections immediately.

- Control blood cholesterol levels with diet and medications if necessary.

- Drink adequate water and choose foods that are low in sugar, fat and salt, but high in fibre. Stick to moderate serving sizes.

- Do not smoke.
- Drink alcohol in moderation.
- Stay at a healthy weight for your height and age.

- Try to exercise moderately for at least 30 minutes a day.

This article is by NKF. For more information or to donate, visit [www.nkf.org.my](http://www.nkf.org.my) or call 03-79549048.