

Are your kidneys ok?

Studies in the US suggest that about 10% of adults have some form of kidney damage ... and do not know about it. Take a screening test to find out if you're one of them.

YOU might have heard stories about people whose kidneys failed suddenly. In reality, their kidneys had been damaged for some time, but they just weren't aware of it. They had chronic kidney disease (CKD), which often presents no signs in the initial ("silent") phase, sometimes lasting for years!

However, a time will come when the disease will start to manifest symptoms. By then, the person's condition is already serious. Irreparable damage has been done. Most of the tiny filters (called nephrons) in the kidneys have been damaged and there are just too few left to take on the extra load of filtering the blood.

Without treatment, all the nephrons will eventually be destroyed and end-stage kidney failure will result.

Causes of CKD

"The kidneys are fragile and have to be protected," says Dr Thiruvethiran Thilaganathan, consultant nephrologist and Hon Secretary on the Board of Managers, National Kidney Foundation (NKF).

He explains: "CKD can result from certain kidney diseases (for example, polycystic kidney disease), kidney infections, blockage of the renal artery (that supplies blood to the kidney), blockage in the urinary tract (due to kidney stones or tumours), long-term use of certain medicines, and inborn kidney

deformities or disorders.

"The top three causes of CKD in Malaysia, however, are uncontrolled diabetes (57% of CKD cases), unknown causes (27%) and uncontrolled high blood pressure (6%)." Diabetes is a disease characterised by constantly high concentrations of glucose in the blood.

Prolonged exposure to such high glucose levels will damage the kidneys and cause a condition called diabetic nephropathy, which is the No 1 cause of kidney failure. Almost a third of people with diabetes develop diabetic nephropathy.

High blood pressure (or hypertension) refers to how hard the blood pushes against the walls of your arteries. Chronic high blood pressure can damage the blood vessels and filters in the kidney. This is especially bad news for people with diabetes because up to 60% of them will eventually develop high blood pressure.

Signs of advanced chronic kidney disease

- Abnormally frequent and voluminous urination (especially at night), which, over time, reverses to become less frequent and in smaller amounts.
- Water retention causing swollen legs, ankles or feet, and puffy eyes.
- Continual itch anywhere on the body for no apparent reason.
- Foamy urine (due to the presence of protein).
- Easily tired and always sleepy.
- Frequent headaches.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Poor appetite, accompanied by weight loss.
- Frequent feeling of wanting to vomit.
- Blood in the urine.

Time to get tested!

Dr Goh Bak Leong, consultant nephrologist and member of the NKF Board of Managers states that, in Malaysia, diabetes is estimated to affect 14% of adults while the prevalence of high blood pressure stands at a staggering 42.6% for adults 30

years and above.

He remarks: "Both diabetes and hypertension can be without symptoms; so many Malaysians out there are walking around totally unaware that their blood glucose or blood pressure may be abnormally high.

"It is also highly likely that they don't know that they either already have CKD or are seriously at risk of developing it."

Dr Tan Chwee Choon, 2nd Vice-Chairman of the NKF Board of Managers, adds: "Clearly, kidney damage has to be detected as early as possible. The sooner you know you're in trouble, the sooner you can be treated to prevent further deterioration," he says.

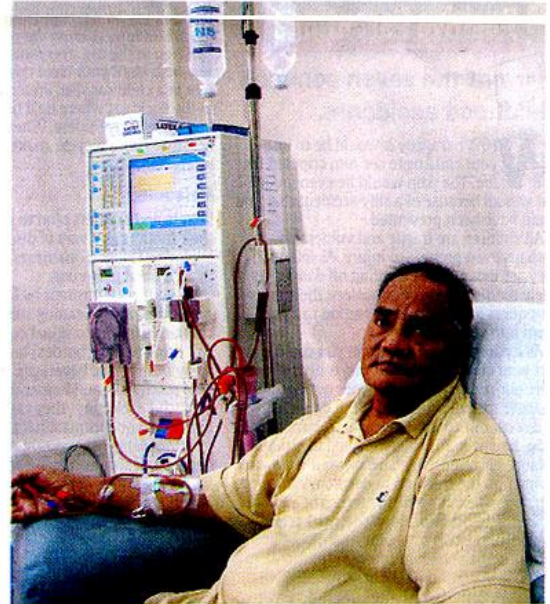
"You have to make the effort to care for your kidneys and prevent end-stage kidney failure. Taking a morning or afternoon off to see the doctor for a test is a small inconvenience compared with spending the rest of your life on dialysis," he remarks.

Evidently, NKF is serious about making the public aware of their CKD risk. As it is, the NKF LifeCheck Mobile Health Screening Unit has already screened more than 4,000 people in Klang Valley since its launch in January 2008.

Dr S.S. Gill, Chairman of NKF Board of Managers, elaborates: "NKF LifeCheck is part of our Kidney Care community education programme. Our NKF LifeCheck bus visits companies and communities daily to offer tests to detect protein in the urine (one of the first signs of kidney damage), high blood glucose, high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol. Checks are also performed to measure body weight status.

"Participants are then counselled, based on their results, by qualified personnel. People with suspected kidney damage, diabetes or high blood pressure will be advised to visit their doctors for a more thorough diagnosis.

"The tests and counselling cost only RM2 per person. This practically-free service is made possible by the generosity of the Sunway Group and other companies who care



Aris bin Said, 53, is a dialysis patient at NKF. For years, he didn't know he had high blood pressure and diabetes. It didn't really bother him until, one day, both his kidneys failed.

enough about the community to underwrite the actual, much higher cost of NKF LifeCheck."

CKD is a serious disease that is made worse by the ignorance and complacency of people. World Kidney Day 2008 has just passed, but hears the echo of its call: "Are your kidneys OK?" If you don't know the answer, ask your doctor today.

Healthy values for healthy kidneys

- Blood glucose - Less than 5.6 mmol/L (fasting)
- Blood pressure - Less than 130/90 mm/Hg
- Urine tests - No trace of protein; no trace of glucose; no trace of blood

- Waist circumference - Less than 102 cm (men); less than 88 cm (women)
- Body mass index - Between 18.5 and 24.9 kg/m²

■ This article is courtesy of NKF KIDNEY CARE, a community education programme by National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia. NKF provides subsidised dialysis treatments and free medications, laboratory tests, follow-ups and welfare assistance to NKF patients besides ongoing public education initiatives.

NKF welcomes public donations to support its work. For more details, please contact NKF Hotline: 1300-88-3110; website: www.nkf.org.my.