

LOVE YOUR KIDNEYS, SAVE YOUR HEART



Did you know that your cardiovascular risk starts rising even when kidney function is mildly impaired? And that cardiovascular disease accounts for more than 50% of all deaths among people with chronic kidney disease?

Also, people with end-stage kidney failure are 10-30 times more likely to die of a stroke, heart attack or other cardiovascular problem compared with the normal adult population.

You might ask what all this has to do with you. A lot, if you currently have some form of kidney or heart disease, whether you are aware of it or not.

According to Dr S. Prasad Menon, a consultant nephrologist and member of National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia, there is a strong link between the state of your heart and kidneys.

"Doctors have been talking about the renal-cardiac syndrome for some years now. Also known as the cardio-renal syndrome, it basically suggests that any acute or chronic disease in either the heart or kidneys can affect the other

organ in an acute or chronic manner.

"What this means is that you can prevent cardiovascular disease by protecting your kidneys, and vice versa."

THE HEART & KIDNEY LINK

Dr Prasad explains how kidney disease harms the heart. "One of the functions of the kidneys is to regulate blood pressure. If they are diseased, high blood pressure results and this, in turn, damages the kidneys. Uncontrolled high blood pressure will damage blood vessels and accelerate the development of a heart attack or stroke.

"As if this isn't bad enough, hormonal secretion by the kidneys goes haywire when they are diseased. Anaemia also sets in. Should the kidneys fail, they will not be able to excrete water from the body, resulting in swelling due to water retention. All these factors, coupled with

This World Heart Day, make the effort to undergo a kidney test; it might just save your life.

high blood pressure, cause an increased volume of blood in the heart. Having to deal with the bigger load, the heart becomes enlarged and less efficient. When this happens, the heart has to

work harder to pump blood to the body. Over time, the heart will tire and eventually fail."

On how heart

disease harms the kidneys, Dr Prasad uses the 'pump & filters' analogy. "The heart pumps blood to all parts of the body, including the kidneys - not only to have the blood filtered there, but also to nourish the kidneys so that they can continue functioning properly.

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"Should something happen to the heart (the pump) – like a heart attack or chronic heart failure – blood flow to the kidneys (the filters) will be affected. If the pump breaks down, so will the filters. It's important to keep both organs in good working condition."

HEART & KIDNEY PROTECTION

Dr Prasad is happy with the growing public awareness of cardiovascular risk factors. "For the sake of avoiding a heart attack or stroke, more people nowadays are making the effort to keep tabs on their weight, blood pressure and levels of blood cholesterol and blood glucose.

"Any risk factor needs to be dealt with. Take smoking, for example. It not only harms the heart, but the kidneys, too. It's also important to realise that high blood glucose (or diabetes) and/or high blood pressure often signals trouble in the kidneys.

"Therefore, treatment for these conditions will not be complete unless the kidneys are also checked. If present, chronic kidney disease must be tackled as well."

Dr Prasad recommends that everyone, regardless of their risk profile, undergo a urine albumin test to detect kidney disease as part of their usual efforts to prevent cardiovascular disease. He also believes it should be part of every annual physical examination.

"In most cases, people with chronic kidney disease are not aware that they have it. The disease exhibits no

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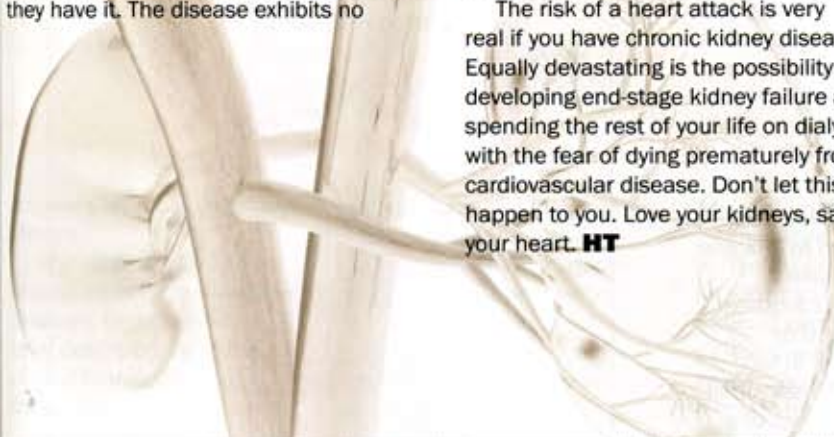
Too early? Ask Linda and she'll tell you that women can get heart attacks way before menopause ... especially if they have chronic kidney disease. She was 44 when she started feeling a dull pain in her back, just below the rib cage. It was tolerable at first, so she didn't get it checked out until several months later. The doctor said she had chronic kidney disease. Her damaged kidneys had also resulted in high blood pressure. Three years later, at the age of 47, she suffered a heart attack. Thankful to have survived, Linda advises all her friends to have their kidneys checked for their hearts' sake.

symptoms until at a very advanced stage. For this reason, we believe some 10% (or more) of the general public could be walking 'time-bombs', going about their daily lives while remaining oblivious to the fact that their kidneys are deteriorating. These individuals are at very high risk of being stricken by a stroke, heart attack or worse.

"So, taking a urine albumin test could be one of the best decisions anyone can make this World Heart Day. You never know what the results might show. When it comes to chronic kidney disease, early detection saves lives," he concludes.

The risk of a heart attack is very real if you have chronic kidney disease. Equally devastating is the possibility of developing end-stage kidney failure and spending the rest of your life on dialysis, with the fear of dying prematurely from cardiovascular disease. Don't let this happen to you. Love your kidneys, save your heart. **HT**

Double whammy. While others would have faltered, Johan got a real buzz from juggling a high-stress advertising career, endless work-related entertaining and a family at home. Yes, he loved every minute of his hectic lifestyle and was rather proud of having only one vice – smoking. Other than that, he thought he was in pretty good shape for a 38-year-old. One day, his life changed forever. After noticing that he was passing frothy urine, he consulted a doctor and was diagnosed with chronic kidney disease. There was more bad news: an ECG revealed blockages in the blood vessels of his heart. Johan suffered a stroke at the age of 46.



Article courtesy of NKF Kidney Care, a community education programme by the National Kidney Foundation of Malaysia. NKF provides subsidised dialysis treatment and free medication, laboratory tests, follow-ups and welfare assistance to needy patients. NKF also conducts on-going public education initiatives. Public health screening is offered through the NKF LifeCheck Mobile Health Screening Unit. Visiting communities and workplaces in a 40-seater customised bus, trained personnel conduct body mass index/waist circumference measurement, blood pressure checks, urine albumin tests and blood tests for glucose and cholesterol. Advice is given based on the results. For more details, call NKF at 1-300-88-3110 or log on to www.nkf.org.my.

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