

# Why you need a kidney test

By MEERA MURUGESAN

## ARE your kidneys okay?

It is a simple question but one that everyone needs to ask.

It's also the theme for World Kidney Day on March 8 in line with the message that early detection is the best way of addressing chronic kidney disease.

There are 15,000 Malaysians on dialysis because of end-stage renal failure brought on by the disease.

"The fact that so many people are going for dialysis is not something to be proud of. Instead, it's worrying," said Dr Tan Chwee Choon, second vice-chairman of the board of managers of the National Kidney Foundation.

Early detection and being able to prevent patients from progressing to end-stage renal failure should be the way to go, he told a Press conference yesterday at the NKF in Petaling Jaya in conjunction with World Kidney Day.

Due to the shortage of kidneys for transplants, many Malaysians go on dialysis for life as opposed to patients in the West who undergo dialysis as a temporary measure while waiting for a transplant, said Dr Tan, who's a consultant nephrologist and president of the Malaysian Society of Nephrology.

As of Dec 31 last year, there were only 1,700 Malaysians living

with kidney transplants in the country.

"When a patient is on dialysis for a long period or for life, this essentially means their place cannot be taken by any other patient unless we build more dialysis centres," said Dr Tan.

"In Malaysia, there are 2,500 new dialysis patients each year and this is alarming."

Chronic kidney disease can be detected through simple tests of small samples of blood and urine in any clinic, yet, many Malaysians don't realise the importance of getting tested.

The progression to kidney failure can be slowed or reduced by between 20 and 50 per cent in most cases if corrective treatment is started early.

Since there are no obvious symptoms in the early stages, many people may not even be aware that they have it, said Dr Tan.

"It's not like heart disease where you feel chest pains," he said.

"It's only at the end-stage when your kidneys cannot function that you become ill."

The number of patients with chronic kidney disease in the country is unknown.

Present figures only relate to those with end-stage renal failure who come in for dialysis.

In conjunction with World Kidney Day, many activities have



DR TAN: Having to go for dialysis is not something to be proud of

been organised to raise awareness about the disease and the importance of early detection.

Among these include an exhibition, public screening and children's art competition at Berjaya Times Square on March 11 and a walkathon at Taman Tasik Titivangsa on March 10.

Major hospitals will also be organising activities such as exhibitions and health screenings.

For details, call 03-79549048 or 1300883110.

The Health Ministry plans to study more than 7,500 people in Gombak in the next few months in an attempt to compile information on the prevalence of chronic kidney disease.

## What causes kidney disease?

THE most common causes are nephrotic or inflammation of the kidney, infections, obstruction in the urinary tract and inherited disorders like polycystic kidney disease.

But this is changing in both developed and developing countries to include diabetes and hypertension.

## Facts about kidney disease

IT is a serious, but common, preventable and manageable health problem.

Those in the high-risk group should get tested because treatment in the early stages slows the progression of the disease.

If you feel you are in that group, you should be checked on a regular basis and modify your lifestyle to minimise the risk of chronic kidney disease.

## Screening must be a priority for:

- PATIENTS with diabetes mellitus and hypertension.
- Individuals who smoke and/or are obese.
- Individuals over 50 years old.
- Individuals with a family history of diabetes mellitus, hypertension and kidney disease.
- Patients with other kidney diseases.

## Ways to reduce the risk

- MAINTAIN a healthy weight.
- Do regular physical exercises.
- Eat a healthy diet consisting of fruits and vegetables.
- Don't smoke.
- Drink water instead of sweet, sugary drinks.
- Visit your doctor annually for a health check.

Source: National Kidney Foundation