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# Should young people start worrying about their kidneys?

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**KUCHING:** The recent statement by Sarawak Heart Centre director Dr Mohd Asri Riffin about the rising incidence of kidney failure among individuals in their 20s, has not only raised concern among many people, but it also makes them wanting to know the contributing factors.

According to a specialist, the two leading causes of end-stage renal disease in Malaysia are diabetes and hypertension (high blood pressure), with the former accounting for over 50 per cent of cases, and the latter, more than 30 per cent.

It is also reported that 250 to 300 new patients with kidney failures are registered annually in Sarawak, requiring dialysis treatment.

“The most common age of these patients is 55 years old and above, comprising up to 60 per cent of the population who require dialysis.

“However, the young patients – those in the 25-34 age group – they account for around six per cent.

“The percentages of those in the 35-44 and 45-55 age groups are 10 to 12.5 per cent, and 21 to 24 per cent, respectively,” said Sarawak General Hospital (SGH)’s head of nephrology Dr Clare Tan.

Adding on, she tagged higher prevalence of diabetes as the leading cause behind the rising incidence of kidney failure cases Malaysia.

“Younger patients are now being diagnosed with diabetes, and if not properly controlled, they could end up having complications, including kidney failure, at that age.”

Dr Tan added that apart from



**DR CLARE TAN**

diabetes and hypertension, another two common risk factors for kidney disease would be a family history of kidney stones and chronic consumption of painkillers.

Asked about stress, she clarified that there was no direct link to kidney disease, the condition could elevate one’s blood pressure.

On treatment, Dr Tan said each should correspond to specific type of kidney disease.

“If a patient has diabetes, a standard measure is maintaining control of one’s blood pressure and blood sugar levels.

“There is a specific medication meant to reduce the amount of protein in the urine, and also maintain an ideal body weight.”

As for treatments for kidney failure, they include the usual haemodialysis where the kidney’s waste-filtering function is performed via machine; peritoneal dialysis, where a special sterile fluid is introduced into the abdomen through a permanent tube that is placed in the peritoneal cavity – this is another way to remove waste products from the blood; and also kidney transplant.

Asked about dialysis centres in Sarawak, Dr Tan said the availability would depend on the locality of the patients.

“The private centres and those run by NGOs (non-governmental organisations) are mainly located in the main urban areas, while patients from the rural areas just have to rely on those available at government-run facilities.

“This said, there are plans to expand the existing government facilities and set up new ones in some health clinics.

“We are also expanding peritoneal dialysis, which is more of a home-based therapy,” she added.

Nevertheless, prevention remained the most effective means, said Dr Tan.

“A healthy lifestyle, including maintaining the ideal body weight, is crucial in preventing the development of diabetes and hypertension, the two leading causes of kidney failure.

“Avoid chronic painkiller’s usage.

“Also, early-stage kidney failure can be asymptomatic, which is why regular check-ups and assessments are essential, especially for those with a family history of kidney disease.

“It cannot be stressed enough that it is very important for you to take good care of yourself,” she advised.

On SGH’s part, Dr Tan said every year, it would hold events in connection with the World Kidney Day at Boulevard Shopping Mall here.

“These activities include a health screening, an exhibition, fitness checks, as well as a quiz on diet.

“However, support is also as important as raising awareness of kidney disease.

“I advocate all of you to give full support, including in terms of donations, to organisations such as the National Kidney Foundation,” she added.