

Be pro-active and avoid kidney disease



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We are increasingly being reminded about the importance of practising healthy lifestyle habits such as clean eating and regular exercise. This is mainly due to the advances in research surrounding the effects that an unhealthy lifestyle can cause later in life, such as obesity, diabetes and cancer. As the cause of death to 38 million people each year, non-communicable diseases (NCD's) are being increasingly monitored. Durbin receives numerous requests annually to source medication and equipment used to treat a huge range of NCD's such as diabetes, and cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. The world's aging population and specifically the continual ascent in numbers of diabetes cases, has played a huge part in seeing kidney disease emerging more frequently as a recognised non-communicable disease worldwide. And, as kidneys are the most in-demand organ for transplantation, good kidney health is not something that should be taken for granted.

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) is usually caused by a long-term disease such as hypertension which slowly damages the kidneys and over time reduces their ability to filter the blood. Waste products which are not being excreted can cause

blood pressure to rise even more, creating a dangerous cycle. www.kidney.org – the website of the National Kidney Foundation in the US – notes that about 30% of patients with Type 1 diabetes and up to 40% of those with Type 2 diabetes will eventually suffer from kidney failure.

It is normal for kidney function to begin to decrease as we get older, but the increasingly overweight population in the Middle East has also resulted in a large number of younger patients suffering with diabetes, hypertension and ultimately CKD. Countries such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and Bahrain have some of the highest percentages of kidney disease prevalence around the world.

The progression of CKD cannot be reversed, but it can be slowed by making healthier lifestyle choices and taking medication. Some recommended immediate changes – such as avoiding salt, drinking water and trying to eat a healthy and balanced diet – can lower the tendency of getting kidney disease. CKD can however ultimately progress to end-stage renal disease or kidney failure at which point the patient will need dialysis or a kidney transplant to survive. Dr Hareth Aljboury, head of nephrology at Al Qassimi Hospital in Sharjah believes cost is an important factor putting people off treatment. Three sessions of dialysis costing Dh2000 are needed per week in most end-stage kidney failure patients. About 40% of the patients having dialysis also have chronic blood sugar and blood pressure problems, which add to costs.

Also known as the 'silent killer', the disease usually displays few symptoms until it is at an advanced stage. Symptoms to look out for include swelling in the body, high blood pressure, changes in urination and feeling very nauseous or weak. A change in kidney function is usually discovered through a blood or urine test. The levels of creatinine in the blood are used to calculate glomerular filtration rate – how effective the kidneys are at filtering blood. Another test

observes the albumin to creatinine ratio in the urine – excess protein may also identify a problem. As warning signs are minimal, people with risk factors should be pro-active with requesting tests. The National Kidney Foundation suggests annual kidney screenings for those with high blood pressure, diabetes, a family history of kidney failure and those over the age of 60.

I read in the UK medical journal *The Lancet* that in 2013, nearly one million people died from CKD. Although this accounts for less than 2% of all deaths globally, it is actually a 135% increase over the number of CKD-related deaths in 1990. As the majority of causes of CKD are preventable, it's a shame to see this disease becoming so common. Although we are more clued up about the risk factors and causes of NCD's, arguably the rising obesity figures show there is a level of ignorance regarding the recommended measures that can be taken to counter them. We must remember that looking after oneself not only benefits us as individuals, but also our healthcare systems and future generations, and therefore ignorance is not always bliss. MEH

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