

Healthy Living

Warning signs of emerging kidney issues

The prevalence of chronic kidney disease (CKD) may surprise those unfamiliar with issues affecting these vital organs that help to purify the blood. According to the National Kidney Foundation®, one in 10 people across the globe is affected by CKD.

The NKF estimates that as many as 35.5 million adults in the United States have kidney disease, while the Kidney Foundation of Canada reports roughly four million people in Canada have kidney disease. It's not uncommon to have kidney disease but not know it, as Dr. Joseph Vassalotti, Chief Medical Officer of the NKF notes that symptoms often do not appear until the late stages of the disease. But two tests, the estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) and the urine albumin-creatinine ratio (uACR), are two easy ways to determine if you have kidney disease or not. The NKF recommends yearly blood tests to determine if you have

kidney disease, and such tests, along with urine tests that may be part of annual wellness exams, might indicate if a person has kidney disease. Individuals also can keep an eye out for various warning signs that suggest kidney function may not be normal.

- Less energy or difficulty concentrating: Malfunctioning kidneys can contribute to a buildup of toxins and impurities in the blood that results in fatigue and difficulty with concentration. Kidney disease also can cause anemia, which is typically accompanied by fatigue.

- Difficulty sleeping: The NKF notes that kidney disease affects the organs' ability to filter toxins in the blood, which can make it difficult to sleep.

- Dry and itchy skin: Few may think that malfunctioning kidneys can adversely affect the skin, but it's true. The NKF notes that when kidneys can no longer help the body maintain an appropriate

balance of minerals and nutrients in the blood, that can lead to chronic kidney disease-associated pruritis, a hallmark of which is itchy skin. This is typically found in people with advanced kidney disease.

- Frequent urination: Kidney disease damages the kidneys' filtration system, and that can lead to a need to urinate with greater

frequency. However, the NKF notes that a need to urinate more often also might indicate a urinary infection or an enlarged prostate in men.

- Blood in the urine: Blood cells can leak into the urine when the kidney's filters are damaged and not filtering waste from the blood as effectively as they should be.

- Foamy urine: The NKF notes kidney disease sometimes produces urine so foamy a toilet must be flushed several times before the bubbles go away. That foam is a sign that a protein known as albumin is in the urine.

Additional signs that you might have CKD include persistent puffiness around the eyes, swollen ankles and

feet, loss of appetite, and muscle cramping. Each of these symptoms might also indicate other health issues, so each should be brought to the attention of a physician.

CKD is a global health problem, and individuals may need to be their own first line of defense. More information is available at kidney.org.

The dynamic between alcohol and cognitive health

Alcohol affects the body whether people drink sparingly or consume it regularly. While much is known about alcohol's effects on everything from the liver to the heart, the link between alcohol and cognitive function is more of a mystery.

The known effects of alcohol on cognitive function are murky, and research has produced mixed findings. One of the more comprehensive studies on alcohol and cognition was a meta-analysis of 143 papers from 250 countries covering the years 1997

to 2011. While the results are complicated, researchers noted a correlation between heavy drinking of four to six drinks per day and cognitive impairment and higher risk for dementia. No significant difference in cognition was observed between light to moderate drinkers and non-drinkers, reports Practical Neurology.

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism says that alcohol can interfere with the brain's communication pathways and affect the way the brain works and looks. Long-term

heavy drinking causes alterations in the neurons, including reducing their size. A JAMA Network study titled "Association of Low to Moderate Alcohol Drinking With Cognitive Functions From Middle Age to Older Age Among Older Adults" published in 2020 offered further insight into the link between alcohol and cognitive function. In this cohort study of 19,887 participants, those whose alcohol consumption was characterized as low to moderate had significantly better trajectories of higher cognition scores for mental status, word recall and vocabulary, and lower rates of decline in each of these areas over those who never drank. The mean age of the participants was 61.8 and the majority of the participants were women. Low to moderate drinking was considered fewer than 8 drinks

per week for women and fewer than 15 for men.

The Alzheimer's Society says evidence shows that excessive alcohol consumption increases a person's risk of developing dementia, while drinking in moderation has not been conclusively linked to an increased risk of dementia. Individuals must speak with their doctors and make informed choices about their alcohol consumption and whether or not drinking is a good idea for them.

Alcohol use is a sticky subject that warrants more research regarding its potential effects on cognition and long-term cognitive health.

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