

5 Things You May Not Know About Kidney Disease

FAMILY FEATURES

Your kidneys - the bean-shaped organs located near the middle of your back on either side of your spine - play a vital role in your overall health. While many people don't think about them unless there's an issue, they filter waste from your blood, which is released as urine, and do other jobs, such as helping control blood pressure, keeping bones healthy, managing vitamin D levels, regulating electrolytes and making red blood cells.

However, 1 in 7 Americans is living with kidney disease, which occurs when the kidneys are damaged and can't filter blood as well as they should. Additionally, 9 out of 10 people with kidney disease are unaware they have it because symptoms often don't appear until the kidneys are badly damaged.

A survey of the public awareness of kidney disease conducted by YouGov on behalf of the American Kidney Fund shows common misconceptions related to kidney disease. Consider these facts from "Know Your Kidneys" as a roadmap toward a better understanding of kidney disease and

steps to improve health.

1. Kidney disease impacts all communities.

Kidney disease does not discriminate; it can affect individuals from all walks of life, regardless of age, race or socioeconomic status. Among those with some form of kidney disease, 6% are 18-29 years old, 19% are 30-44, 34% are 45-64 and 41% are 65 or older. While certain demographics may have higher prevalence rates due to genetic or environmental factors, no community is immune.

2. Dialysis can be done at home.

Many people are unaware that dialysis, a life-saving treatment for those suffering from kidney failure, can be performed at home. In fact, less than half (45%) who are aware of dialysis believe it can be done at home, according to the survey. Home dialysis offers greater flexibility and can improve quality of life, allowing patients to maintain a more regular lifestyle

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by reducing required clinic visits.

There are two main types of home dialysis: peritoneal dialysis and home hemodialysis. Both methods require training, but home dialysis can empower patients to take control of their treatment and manage their condition more effectively.

3. Diabetes is the most common cause.

Though only 33% of people surveyed identified the most common cause of kidney disease, diabetes accounts for nearly half of all cases of kidney failure (47%), according to the American Kidney Fund.

High blood sugar levels can damage the blood vessels in the kidneys over time, leading to a gradual decline in kidney function. Managing blood sugar levels through diet, exercise and medication may help prevent kidney damage. Additionally, undergoing regular check-ups with a health care provider can be useful in monitoring kidney function and catching early signs of kidney disease.

4. Medications can help manage kidney disease.

While 19% of people surveyed believe diet and exercise are the only ways to manage kidney disease, various medications can, in fact, help manage the condition, stop or slow its progression and help prevent complications. These include medications to lower blood pressure, control blood sugar levels and treat

anemia and bone disease associated with kidney disease.

Patients should work closely with their health care providers to develop a treatment plan tailored to their specific needs. Taking medicines as prescribed and making lifestyle changes, such as managing weight, maintaining a balanced diet, staying active and avoiding smoking can improve outcomes and enhance quality of life.

5. Specific tests can assess kidney function.

There are several tests available to assess kidney function and detect abnormalities early on. However, only a minority of survey respondents recognized all the tests recommended to assess kidney function and knew whether they'd taken the tests. The most common tests include blood tests to measure creatinine levels and urine tests to check for protein or blood, which can be indicators of kidney problems. Talk to your doctor about these tests and whether they're right for you.

Regular screening, especially for those at higher risk of kidney disease, including individuals with diabetes or high blood pressure, can lead to earlier diagnosis and intervention.

Learn how to take care of your kidney health, including taking kidney health quizzes to assess your risk, at KnowYourKidneys.org.



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