

# Health Awareness

A County Health Pool Publication



March 2012

## National Kidney Month

**D**o you know one out of nine Americans has kidney disease? That number translates to 26 million Americans with kidney disease. The first day of March kicks off National Kidney Month, so let's take a closer look at this vital organ and learn more about kidney disease.



### What is the Kidney?

The kidney is a bean-shaped, fist-sized organ. Humans typically have two kidneys, one on each opposing side of the spine directly below the rib cage. The primary function of the kidney is to remove waste products and excess fluid from the body in the form of urine. The kidney is a reprocessing filter to the bloodstream, transporting 200 quarts of fluid in 24 hours, of which 2 quarts leave the body in the form of urine, and the remaining 98 quarts go to other parts of the body. The kidney is also responsible for regulating acceptable chemical levels of sodium, phosphorus and potassium in the blood and the release of three hormones, two of which sustain healthy bones and bone marrow and one of which monitors blood pressure.

### Chronic Kidney Disease

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) occurs when the kidney is not able to do its job, causing waste fluids to ac-

cumulate in the body. This build-up of waste results in weakened bones, nerve damage, and lack of overall nutritional health. Diabetes and high blood pressure are the root cause of two-thirds of CKD cases. Diabetes occurs when blood sugar levels in the body are too high which damages many organs in the body, including the kidneys. High blood pressure, or hypertension, is the force of blood pushing against the artery walls. If high blood pressure is not controlled or is left unchecked, it can lead to chronic diseases affecting the kidney and the heart. If your family has a history of kidney disease, you are at higher risk for developing kidney problems. Share all family history of kidney disease with your doctor and be on the alert for any warning signs (below), and changes in your overall health and wellbeing.

### Warning Signs of Kidney Disease

According to the National Kidney Foundation, there are six warning signs of chronic kidney disease:

- High blood pressure (which can be confusing because high blood pressure can lead to kidney disease and the reverse is also true: Kidney disease can lead to high blood pressure).
- Blood and/or protein in the urine.
- A creatinine and Blood Urea Nitrogen (BUN) with results falling outside the normal parameters. (These tests measure different levels of waste products in your blood and urine.)
- A glomerular filtration rate (GFR) of less than 60. GFR measures kidney function.
- Frequent urination, typically at night. Also, painful urination.
- Eye puffiness, swollen hands and feet.

*(Over)*

## **National Kidney Month** (Continued)

### **What Are Kidney Stones?**

Another kidney dysfunction is kidney stones which occur when accumulated waste begins to crystallize in the kidney and form small stones that can be difficult to pass through the urine. These stones may block the urinary track and become painful, causing extreme discomfort and blood or dark discoloration in the urine. If you experience any symptoms of kidney stones, consult your doctor immediately. Your doctor may request increased fluid intake to pass the stone, or may prescribe Shock Wave Lithotripsy (SWL). SWL consists of pressure waves from an external source that zone in on the kidney stone to break up the mass into smaller fragments, allowing the bits of stone to easily pass through the body. SWL is the most common treatment for kidney stones in the U.S. However, in some cases where SWL attempts have been exhausted or more extreme measures must be taken, outpatient

surgery may be required in order to remove the stone.

### **Testing Kidney Function**

There are three simple tests that are recommended by the National Kidney Foundation to detect kidney disease. The first is blood pressure measurement which is determined by using a blood pressure cuff to get two numbers: the top number which is the higher number is for systolic blood pressure (the pressure in the blood vessels when the heart is beating), and the bottom number which is lower is for diastolic blood pressure (the pressure in the vessels when the heart is resting). A normal blood pressure reading is 120/80 or “120 over 80.”

The second test involves monitoring levels of protein in the urine, using a dipstick to detect protein levels. The third test is creatinine measurement which calculates glomerular filtration rates (GFR), or the efficiency level of the kidney’s removal of waste from the blood.

### **What Steps Can Be Taken to Improve Kidney Disease?**

Although no cure exists for chronic kidney disease, there are steps that can be followed to improve kidney function. It is important to regulate your blood pressure at a level at or below 130/80. Changing your diet under a dietitian’s direction is critical, as certain types of foods may quicken kidney failure. Protein intake should be limited, and cholesterol and high-fat, high-sodium foods together with certain potassium-rich foods should be avoided along with smoking.

### **Wrap-Up**

As you now know, the kidney is a life-giving organ in the human body. If you have a history of kidney disease in your family, or have experienced any of the symptoms discussed in this newsletter, please consult your doctor immediately.

Sources: [www.kidney.niddk.nih.gov/kudiseases/pubs/yourkidneys/#kidneys](http://www.kidney.niddk.nih.gov/kudiseases/pubs/yourkidneys/#kidneys)

[www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org)

---

## **Benefits Corner**

### **When would my visit be billed as Preventive?**

Preventive Care Services include outpatient services and physician office services. Screenings and other services are covered as preventive care for adults and children with no current symptoms or prior history of a medical condition associated with that screening or service.

Members who have current symptoms or have been diagnosed with a medical condition are not considered to require preventive care for that condition but instead benefits will be considered under the Physician Office Services or Diagnostic Services benefits.

In-Network Preventive Care Services have to meet requirements as set forth by federal and state law. Many preventive care services when provided by participating providers are covered by the CHP Plan Document with no deductible, co-payment or co-insurance. That means that we pay 100% of the maximum allowed amount for participating providers. For a list of services, you may view the CHP Plan Document at [www.ctsi.org](http://www.ctsi.org) click on CHP under the Pools, then click on link “Click here to access some important CHP documents and forms”.

If you have any specific questions, you may contact our dedicated Anthem customer service unit at 1-866-698-0087 or your CHP Benefits Administrator at 303-861-0507.