

Kidney Disease

Kidneys can fail suddenly due to trauma or critical illness, but kidney (or renal) failure is more commonly caused by a chronic condition such as diabetes or high blood pressure. In fact, up to 40 per cent of people with diabetes and 35 per cent of those with heart disease also suffer from some degree of kidney disease.

If kidney disease is diagnosed early, its progression can often be slowed and sometimes even stopped through lifestyle, diet and medication changes. If the kidneys fail, dialysis or kidney transplant is necessary for survival. Currently, the number of people in BC with end-stage kidney disease requiring dialysis is growing by up to five per cent per year.

Risk Factors

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Family history of kidney disease
- Individuals from specific high-risk ethnic groups (e.g. First Nations, Asian, South Asian, African American, Pacific Islanders).

The Basic Facts

- Kidneys are essential to normal body functioning. Kidney failure is fatal unless a patient receives regular and ongoing dialysis or a new kidney through transplant.
- An estimated 145,000 people in BC have some level of chronic kidney disease.
- Because the symptoms of early stage kidney disease are easily misunderstood or ignored, many people with the disease are unaware of it.
- Early diagnosis and intervention are critical as outcomes for patients on dialysis are poor. The annual mortality rate for patients on dialysis is 10 per cent, and the five-year survival rate is worse than for all cancers except lung cancer.
- Every day, an average of 12 Canadians experience kidney failure.

“I’m familiar with kidney care in other provinces and there’s nothing like it [BCPRA] in the rest of the country.”

— Patient

The kidneys perform many functions.

The most important kidney functions are:

- Controlling the fluid balance in our bodies
- Controlling the chemical composition (or electrolyte balance) of our blood
- Removing the waste products (creatinine and urea) in our blood
- Helping to maintain hemoglobin at normal levels
- Regulating blood pressure
- Assisting in adequate absorption of calcium, therefore helping to build strong bones.

Early Symptoms

Although many people show no symptoms until the disease has progressed beyond its early stage, early symptoms may include:

- Foamy or bloody urine
- Headaches
- Frequent need to urinate at night
- Puffy eyes or ankles.

Symptoms as the Disease Progresses

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Puffy eyes or ankles
- Restless legs
- Anorexia
- Polyuria (large volume/increased frequency of urination – as seen in diabetes)
- Itching.

For information and statistics on the numbers of renal patients in BC, visit www.bcrenalagency.ca



BC Renal Agency

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

BC Provincial Renal Agency

T 604.875.7340

F 604.875.7366

bcpra@bcpra.ca

www.bcrenalagency.ca

Last updated Spring 2009