

Kidney Disease

The Silent Killer Among Us

FOR SANJAY SHAH, M.D., A NEPHROLOGIST AT SANDHILLS NEPHROLOGY & INTERNAL MEDICINE, THE FIGHT AGAINST KIDNEY DISEASE IS PERSONAL.

“I was 16 years old when my father went into kidney failure,” he said. “Then I lost my mother to kidney disease when I was 21.”

Dr. Shah would like to see Americans – particularly African Americans, for whom the disease is more prevalent – take up arms against kidney disease. And knowledge, he says, is our most powerful weapon.

“People are walking around all the time not knowing they have kidney disease or kidney problems,” said Dr. Shah. “In its early stages, the disease does not have any symptoms. I think everyone over the age of 18 should see their physician and have their kidney function tested.”

Why is kidney function so important? The kidneys provide a vital service as the body’s very own waste filter. They remove waste products from the blood, control fluid balance, regulate blood pressure and stimulate red blood cell production.

It is unclear why African Americans are more likely to experience kidney disease (one out of every three people with kidney failure is African American), but it is believed to be related to a higher percentage of African Americans with diabetes and high blood pressure.

Diabetes is the number one cause of kidney failure, according to the American Kidney Fund. African Americans are more than twice as likely as whites to have diabetes.

The second most common cause of kidney disease is high blood pressure. And African Americans have higher rates of high blood pressure. In fact, more than 42 percent of the African American adult population has high blood pressure.

Other risk factors for kidney disease include a family history and high use of pain medications, such as Advil, Motrin and Aleve.

“People in our society use these medications like candy,” said Dr. Shah. “They can definitely affect your kidneys, especially if someone is dehydrated, which can happen easily in the summer months.”

Kidney disease can be easily detected with blood testing and urine testing.

Chronic kidney disease cannot be cured, but it can be slowed down with the help of certain medications, such as ACE inhibitors. Discovering you have a disease that has no symptoms is the first step on the road to improved health.

“I just saw a gentleman today,” said Dr. Shah. “He is 71 and he had never seen a doctor until he was 69. And when he finally did see his physician, he found that he had stage three kidney disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.”

Waiting too long to treat kidney disease is very dangerous. While the kidneys will continue to service the body, even while they are losing function, once they reach between five and ten percent of normal function, either a kidney transplant or dialysis is necessary to live.

“Unless you know someone who is willing to give you a kidney, the average wait time for a transplant is between 4 1/2 and 5 years,” said Dr. Shah. “We fall farther behind every year because while there is more than 100,000 people on the transplant list, only about 14,000 transplants occur each year in this country.”

The signs of kidney disease include:

- Swelling of the body, especially around the eyes and ankles
- Nausea and vomiting
- A metallic taste in the mouth
- Shortness of breath or chest pain from fluid collecting in the lungs
- Weakness and lethargy
- Pain in the lower back
- Pain during urination or frequent urination

“There are still millions of people who have kidney disease and don’t know it,” said Dr. Shah. “My request is that anybody – black, white, Hispanic – know your family history. Even if you feel fine, get a physical. Get your blood checked. Get your urine checked. Have your physician check your kidneys.”



Sanjay Shah, M.D.
Nephrologist



CAPE FEAR VALLEY HEALTH

www.capefearvalley.com

Listen for Take Charge of Your Health messages on radio stations
Foxy 99.1 FM, Jamz 107.7 FM, Soul 104.5 FM and WIDU 1600 AM.