

All About Aging

by Hong-Phuc Tran, M.D.

How Healthy Are Your Kidneys?

Kidney disease is common in many of us as we get older, but we may not even know that we have it. It is the 9th leading cause of death in the U.S. and affects more than 26 million Americans – *one in nine adults*.

Kidney Function

Our kidneys play many important roles, including filtering wastes from the blood, regulating blood pressure and balancing fluid, salt and acid in our body. They are vital in producing red blood cells and vitamin D, which is essential for healthy bones.

Risk Factors

Who's at risk? There are certain risk factors that increase your likelihood of developing kidney disease, including:

- Diabetes mellitus.
- Hypertension (high blood pressure).
- Family history of kidney disease.

- Age 60 or older.
- Hispanic, African-American, Native American or Pacific Islander ancestry.

Diabetes mellitus and high blood pressure are the two leading risk factors for kidney disease. If left uncontrolled, these conditions can damage blood vessels in your kidneys and cause protein leakage into the urine.

Symptoms of kidney disease include swelling in the legs and ankles (edema), fatigue, nausea, unintentional weight loss, itchy skin, muscle cramps and confusion.

Screening

You can be screened for kidney disease by asking your doctor to perform some blood and urine tests. These screenings include:

- Basic metabolic panel to assess your electrolytes and kidney function.



- Urinalysis.
- Urine protein ratio tests.
- Estimated kidney filtration rate to assess how well your kidneys remove waste from the blood.

Prevention

There are certain things you can do to protect your kidneys, beginning with getting your hypertension and diabetes mellitus under good control. Avoiding certain painkillers such as ibuprofen and naproxen – *or products containing these medications* – will also help with prevention. However, if these painkillers are necessary, then try to limit their use to 1-2 weeks.

Kidney health is vital to your overall health. With a few simple screenings and precautions, you can ensure your kidneys are working to the best of their ability!

Dr. Hong-Phuc Tran is a geriatrician with the highly regarded UCLA Geriatrics Program based in Santa Monica. For more information, call (310) 319-4371 or visit www.uclahealth.org.

