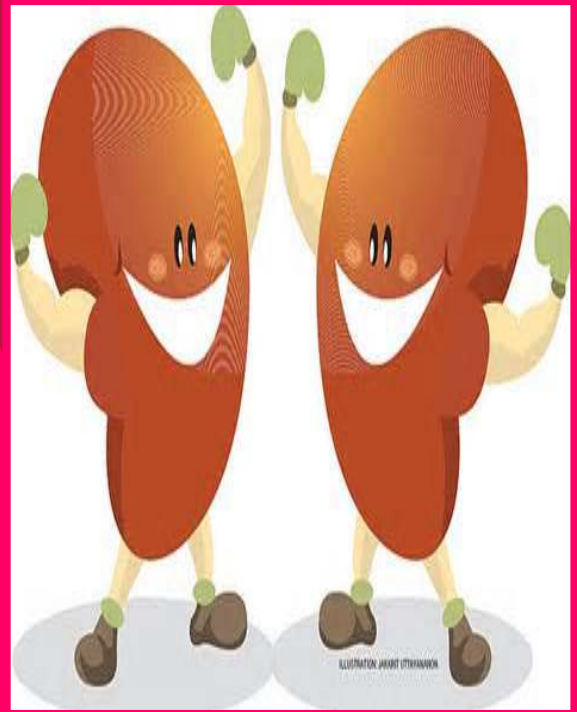


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October 9, 2015

Keeping Kidneys Healthy



You probably don't think often about your kidneys. But when there is a problem, it's important to have some information. Kidney disease is a condition in which your kidneys are damaged and can no longer do their job. Healthy kidneys make urine and remove waste from your body. If your kidneys are damaged, waste builds up in your body. Detecting kidney disease early can keep your kidneys from getting worse.

What Your Kidneys Do

Your kidneys keep your blood clean and chemically balanced. Kidney function is also called renal function. People with two healthy kidneys have 100 percent kidney function. Many people can live with less than 100 percent kidney function — about 60 to 70 percent — and not even notice it.

Kidney Anatomy

Your kidneys are in your middle back, just below your rib cage. There is one on either side of your spine. Each of your kidneys is shaped like a bean and is about the size of your fist.

Inside each kidney are about 1 million nephrons — tiny processors that sift waste and extra fluid out of your blood. This waste and fluid becomes urine, which flows from the kidneys to the bladder. Your bladder stores this urine until you release it.

Chemicals, Hormones and Your Kidneys

When your kidneys are sorting waste, they also release useful chemicals, such as sodium, phosphorus and potassium, back into your blood for your body to use. Your kidneys ensure the right balance of chemicals in your blood, keeping you healthy.

Kidney Disease

Diabetes and high blood pressure are the most common causes of kidney disease. Over time, these conditions slowly damage your kidneys until they no longer filter your blood like they should. Work with your doctor to manage your blood sugar and blood pressure. Certain medications to treat these conditions, such as ACE inhibitors and ARBs for high blood pressure, may protect your kidneys.

What to Eat

Watching what you eat is also important. Cut back on salt. With kidney problems, extra sodium can build up in your body and increase your blood pressure. Instead, reach for salt-free ways to add flavor, such as fresh lemon juice, garlic or onion. Eat heart-healthy foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy foods.

Sources: Kidneyfund.org; National Kidney Disease Educational Program