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European Renal Association -
European Dialysis and Transplant Association

World Kidney Day 2014 highlights chronic kidney disease and ageing

7 March 2014

'Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) and ageing' is the main focus of this year's World Kidney Day on 13 March. The European Renal Association – European Dialysis and Transplant Association (ERA-EDTA), the society of European kidney specialists, fully endorses this yearly initiative (for more information regarding WKD click here). The aim of this global day of action is to raise awareness for the prevention of kidney disease. This year's topic is Chronic Kidney Disease and ageing, since decreasing renal function is one of the signs of ageing. However, various lifestyle factors can accelerate such decline. In order to live as long as possible without dialysis, everybody and in particular elderly people should take good care of their kidneys, by optimizing their lifestyle.

Many cases of chronic kidney disease do not arise until the second half of people's lives. It is normal for organ function to deteriorate slightly on ageing, but when diabetes mellitus, high blood pressure or smoking cause additional damage to blood vessels – kidneys consist of many small collections of tubules or vessels – then kidney function may decline more rapidly. When organ function is less than 10%, this is referred to as renal failure. Those affected are then dependent on renal replacement therapy, i.e. either kidney transplantation or dialysis (filtering of blood). Such therapy has serious life-changing implications for the patient, and also financial implications for their family and for society. There are currently about 318.000 dialysis patients in Europe, many of whom are over 65 years of age. Most of them undergo hemodialysis for four to five hours, three times a week. Because kidney failure not only has negative impacts on quality of life, but also involves a significantly greater risk of cardiovascular disease, elderly people in particular should try to keep their kidneys functioning properly as long as possible.

How to have 'strong kidneys' in old age

A blood and urine test, which should be carried out every two years by a general practitioner, especially in patients at risk (see below), allows any decline in renal function to be detected at an early stage. Additional support from a kidney doctor (nephrologist) can then stop or at least slow



NEWS

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the progress of the kidney disease, if present. A way to protect the health of kidneys is to avoid the following risk factors:

Diabetes mellitus as a risk factor

Diabetics are at particular risk of developing renal insufficiency, which is why in their case a kidney function check-up once a year is recommended. Every healthy person should try to actively prevent type-2 diabetes, because in many cases it is caused by overweight and lack of exercise. A healthy lifestyle is active prophylaxis of diabetes and also protects the kidneys.

High blood pressure as a risk factor

People with high blood pressure are similarly at risk of developing renal insufficiency, so an annual kidney function check-up is recommended in such cases as well. Patients with high blood pressure must ensure they have optimal control of their blood pressure. If they fail to take their medication, their kidneys may be damaged as a result. High blood pressure is often triggered by obesity, lack of exercise and stress – so a healthy lifestyle helps to prevent it!

Smoking as a risk factor

Smoking is the worst threat to vascular health. Innumerable tiny vessels in the kidneys perform the organ's vital filtering function, so smoking is not only a vascular 'poison', but also a 'kidney poison'.

Acute damage to the kidneys as a risk factor

If kidneys are suddenly damaged, their function may be affected not only on the short term but also on the long run. Damaging factors are certain medications (especially painkillers, diuretics, and some antibiotics) but also sudden volume losses (e.g. at the occasion of vomiting or diarrhea). Consult a physician in case of such conditions. Try to drink enough when volume loss occurs.

What if kidney function is already compromised?

The four risk factors above should very definitely be avoided if kidney function is already compromised! Diabetics as well as anybody with Chronic Kidney Disease must ensure they have optimal control of their blood pressure, which in most cases corresponds to a maximum threshold of 130 mmHg systolic and 80 mmHg diastolic.

For more information regarding World Kidney Day 2014 [click here](#).



NEWS

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About ERA-EDTA

With more than 6,600 members, the ERA-EDTA ("European Renal Association – European Dialysis and Transplant Association") is one of the biggest nephrology associations worldwide and one of the most important and prestigious European Medical Associations. It supports basic and clinical research in the fields of clinical nephrology, dialysis, renal transplantation and related subjects. The ERA-EDTA supports a number of studies as well as research groups and has founded a special "Fellowship Programme" for young investigators as well as grant programmes. In order to involve young nephrologists in all activities of the ERA-EDTA the Council decided to create a Young Nephrologists' Platform (YNP). Besides, it has established various research networks and different working groups to promote the collaboration of nephrologists with other medical disciplines (e.g. cardiology, immunology). Furthermore, a "European Renal Best Practice" (ERBP) advisory board has been established by the ERA-EDTA to draw up and publish guidelines and position statements. Another important goal of the ERA-EDTA is education: several series of CME-courses as well as the annual congress offer an attractive scientific programme to cover the need of continuous medical education for doctors working in the fields of nephrology, dialysis and transplantation. The association's journals, NDT (Nephrology, Dialysis, Transplantation) and CKJ (Clinical Kidney Journal), are currently the leading nephrology journals in Europe. The ERA-EDTA Registry is a large epidemiologic database comparing countries by assessing nephrology practice throughout Europe. Finally, ERA-EDTA is member of the European Kidney Health Alliance (EKHA), a consortium of renal societies that actively interacts with the European Parliament. For more information please visit www.era-edta.org