

Smoking and Kidney Disease

By Beth Shanaman RD

Smoking... With warning labels and nationwide anti-smoking campaigns there is no doubt that people know about the risks from this habit. What you may not know is that there are more risks for kidney patients who smoke. People who smoke with kidney failure (especially diabetics) may need dialysis sooner. They have a higher risk for heart disease and high blood pressure, and have more problems with their kidney disease

Smokers who are not yet on dialysis may need dialysis sooner than if they did not smoke. In a recent study, scientists decided that smoking was the most powerful factor that caused decreased kidney function. It was the only factor that could be changed. Scientists continue to search for the reasons that smoking speeds up kidney damage, but feel it may be due to less blood getting to the kidneys, damage to blood vessels, or toxic factors that hurt the kidneys.

The risk for heart disease increases in kidney patients who smoke. Heart disease leads to heart attack, stroke or the loss of body parts by amputation. Smokers with kidney problems have heart disease more often and die sooner

Smoking can cause blood clots that can stop you from getting dialysis or can cause a stroke. It can also alter the way your high blood pressure medications work while you are smoking. This change may not be noticed by your doctor since you cannot smoke in the hospital or doctor's office.

Finally, people with diabetes who smoke need dialysis sooner, have problems with insulin, and more trouble with high blood pressure and heart disease. Overall, death rates are higher in smokers with diabetes.

So, what is the bottom line? Smoking is the single most important health factor that you can control. It has the most effect on stopping further damage to your body and your kidneys. Over and over again it has been proven that for people with kidney disease, to have better quality of life and more years to live, the best change to make is to put out that cigarette...and keep it out!

Quitting Smoking

If you have decided to quit, how is quitting different for you because of your kidney disease? Some ways to quit smoking may not be good for you because of your kidney failure, or medicines you take.

Don't start any over-the-counter stop-smoking products like nicotine patches or nicotine gum without talking to your doctor first. These products may not work with the other medicines that you take and may make you sick.

Many stop-smoking programs tell you to eat lots of fruit or vegetables and to drink lots of water to replace smoking. This may not work with your kidney diet and may cause you more problems. Talk to your nutritionist to see what will work for you.

Smoking is sometimes a way to cope with stress or sadness. Sometimes these feelings are due to your health problems. Counseling can help to deal with that stress and make quitting easier. Talk to your Social Worker to help you find someone to talk to about quitting.

So after talking to your health care team and your doctors, where do you find help to stop smoking? Get your family and friends involved in helping you to stop. Many hospitals and health care facilities have programs to help with quitting.