

The Humble Kidney



Neither as romantic as the heart nor as smart as the brain, the kidney is the humble blue-collar worker of the body's internal organs. Each kidney comes with a partner, and working as a pair, the kidneys do the dirty work of cleaning up after the body. The main task is filtering fluids and expelling toxins via urine – work so essential that if the kidneys go on strike, the body fails. The humble kidney is a vital asset.

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For Dr. Subil Go at Oroville Hospital, the kidney was so fascinating that it drew him off his initial course of studying the heart, back when he was a young medical student. Dr. Go made the kidney his specialty as he graduated into medical programs at Rhode Island and Brown universities, and today he is Oroville Hospital's lead nephrologist, or "kidney doctor." Dr. Go emphasizes the importance of maintaining healthy kidneys.

"Kidneys are not just cleaning organs," he says. "They produce important hormones in the body. Aside from that, they also regulate a lot of the electrolytes that keep your body in check and assure muscle health and nerve health, like sodium, calcium, and potassium."

In spite of the important roles that the kidneys play in keeping a body healthy, the symptoms of a failing kidney can be surprisingly subtle. Toxins that should be expelled through the kidney's filtration process build up in the bloodstream and in body tissues, Dr. Go explains, and the result is, simply, "a sick feeling." To diagnose kidney disease, he says, a

blood test is required.

"It's important to be plugged into a primary care doctor, who is so important in helping us make an early diagnosis of kidney disease," he says.

As with many diseases, certain conditions can predictably precede – even cause – kidney disease. These include high blood pressure and obesity. Smoking can correlate with high occurrence of kidney disease, too – but nothing, perhaps, is so closely associated with poorly functioning kidneys as diabetes. This disease prevents the body from utilizing dietary sugar, which builds up in the blood and can cause damage to blood vessels, tissue, and the kidneys. Exactly how high blood sugar harms the kidneys is not well understood, Dr. Go says, but the correlation is clear: Of every 1,000 people with diabetes, almost 100 will develop a form of kidney disease.

A treatment called dialysis can accomplish the work that healthy kidneys perform – but dialysis is time-consuming, often demanding several visits per week and several hours of blood cleansing at a time. A kidney transplant can effectively cure kidney disease, though at the cost of major surgery. Fortunately, our two kidneys allow us to donate one if needed – but there is a cure for kidney disease better than all the rest: prevention. So see your doctor regularly. Ask about your kidneys. Keep them healthy.

And keep them at work.



Oroville Hospital