Many individuals think that kidney failure and diagnosis of kidney disease only happen to older populations. But, did you know that the epidemics of type 2 diabetes and obesity contribute to an increase in chronic kidney disease (CKD)?

What is chronic kidney disease?

The kidneys filter the blood to produce urine. In 2002, the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) defined CKD as a decrease in the kidney’s ability to function as a filter, and/or markers of kidney damage that usually appear in the urine. CKD is a silent disease, since most people with the condition feel well or have minimal symptoms. Complications of CKD include:

- High blood pressure
- Anemia (low blood count)
- Bone disease
- Poor nutritional health
- Nerve damage

Usually only when the kidneys fail do wastes build to high levels in the blood and make one feel sick. Kidney disease also increases the risk of having heart and blood vessel disease.

How do you know if you have CKD?

There are two simple CKD tests that can be performed during a routine physician visit. The first is a measure of the kidney function called estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR). The eGFR is determined using the serum creatinine (a blood test), age, sex and race. This simplifies the more cumbersome and generally less accurate 24-hour urine collection.

Second, urine is also evaluated for urinary albumin-creatinine ratio. Albumin, a type of protein, is a sign of kidney damage when found in the urine.

CKD is most commonly caused by diabetes and high blood pressure. Early detection and treatment can often keep CKD from getting worse. CKD may progress to chronic kidney failure, which requires dialysis or a
kidney transplant to maintain life. About 10 to 15 percent of the U.S. adult population has CKD. In other words, one in every nine American adults has CKD.

The epidemics of type 2 diabetes and obesity, as well as the aging of the population, are expected to contribute to an increase in CKD. When most people think of kidney disease, they think of dialysis or kidney transplantation. They do not understand that CKD is a spectrum and that the majority of people are unaware they have the condition.

Does obesity cause CKD?

As an indirect cause, obesity increases the risk of the major CKD risk factors - type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure. A direct cause would be when the kidneys have to work harder, filtering above the normal level, called hyperfiltration, to meet the metabolic demands of the increased body mass index (BMI) in individuals affected by obesity. This increase in normal function is also associated with a higher risk of developing CKD in the long-term.

Why is CKD awareness important for a person affected by obesity?

A person affected by obesity should consider the positive benefits of weight reduction, which include the prevention or risk reduction, and in some cases cure of chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and CKD. Kidney screening tests, such as annual eGFR and urinary albumin-creatinine ratio, are suggested for all individuals with obesity, particularly those with diabetes or high blood pressure.

How is a person affected by obesity and CKD treated?

The integration of a healthy diet, physical activity and refreshing sleep is the focus of management of the patient with obesity and CKD. There are a number of cell phone applications that allow the individual to track daily dietary intake and physical activity to aid implementation. These recommendations may be helpful, whether or not you have CKD.

Diet

Extreme diets are not advised and probably not successful in the long-term. The challenge is to modify behavior in a way that will change the way a person lives, resulting in prolonged benefits. The United States Department of Agriculture’s new MyPlate strategy attempts to achieve that goal using an icon of a plate divided into sections to recommend a healthy meal plan (see image above). Using smaller portions, changing from large nine-inch plates to seven-inch plates, is an example of a behavioral technique that might be helpful. Another simple and clear recommendation is to substitute water for sugary drinks.

Specific diet components worth highlighting include limiting protein and sodium. A general recommendation you can use with meals to moderate protein intake is three ounce portion sizes of meat, fish or chicken. This serving is visualized as the size of a deck of cards, which is consistent with the MyPlate concept. Popular high-protein diets for weight-loss, such as the Atkins Diet, should be avoided as the protein excess may increase the work load of the kidney and promote loss of kidney function.
Too much salt consumption increases blood pressure and contributes to CKD in predisposed individuals. The recent Institute of Medicine report recommends a sodium intake of 2,300 milligrams/day for healthy young people and 1,500 milligrams for all Americans more than 50-years-old, or for younger individuals with diabetes, high blood pressure or CKD.

Medical nutrition therapy with a dietitian is covered by Medicare for both diabetes and CKD but is unfortunately underutilized. A nutrition expert can help you read a food label to make healthy choices for your individualized diet plan.

Physical activity

Physical activity is crucial to successful healthy weight reduction. Exercise increases energy expenditure, promotes weight-loss and helps sustain a healthy weight. Inactivity is unhealthy and should be avoided.

The goal to work toward is two hours and 30 minutes of moderate intensity exercise a week. This is usually spread out throughout the week in doable moments of activity, 20-30 minutes at a time, or even shorter intervals. A simple step is to increase daily walking. Using a gradual approach to increase activity is most likely to be successful. You should partner with your healthcare practitioner to determine the best type of exercise program.

Sleep

Adequate sleep promotes maintenance of a healthy weight. Most individuals require about seven hours of sleep each night. Many studies suggest that irregular sleep patterns, eating before sleep and short sleep duration are all linked to obesity. Also, individuals with obesity are more likely to have sleep apnea, which may be found with high blood pressure and CKD. Symptoms of sleep apnea are daytime sleepiness, lack of feeling refreshed after sleep, loud snoring and periods of not breathing during sleep.

Pharmaceutical treatment of obesity in the context of CKD

It is best to try to avoid drug therapy and focus first on the previous interventions mentioned. Drug therapy may be used to augment the previously mentioned interventions and should only be used under the supervision of a treating clinician.

Surgical treatment of obesity in the context of CKD

Weight-loss surgery is used to treat severe obesity for individuals with a BMI greater than 40 or a BMI greater than 35 with diabetes or any other obesity-related condition. The substantial weight-loss often reported may result in improvements in blood sugar and blood pressure and a resolution of hypertension. Preliminary results suggest such surgery can improve the levels of albumin in the urine for patients with CKD.

Research is ongoing to assess the effects of this treatment in patients with CKD. Weight-loss surgery has an added benefit for the CKD patient affected by obesity, as it increases the chances to qualify for a kidney transplant, since obesity may limit access to kidney transplantation as a treatment for chronic kidney failure.

Conclusion

Healthy lifestyle and an environment promoting healthy eating and physical activity will help in the prevention and treatment of obesity. Moreover, healthy body weight will reduce the risk of major chronic diseases, diabetes, high blood pressure, CKD and cardiovascular disease. Increasing awareness of CKD among overweight patients and healthcare professionals alike will help spread the word that CKD is preventable, harmful and treatable.

For a list of references used in this article, please view the online version at www.obesityaction.org.

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Membership Application

Yes! I would like to join the OAC’s efforts. I would like to join as a/an:

- Individual Member: $20/year
- Institutional Member: $500/year
- Chairman’s Council: $1,000 and up/year

Name: ___________________________________
Company: ________________________________
Address: _________________________________
City: _________________________________
State: ________________________________
Zip: _________________________________
Phone: _________________________________
Email: _________________________________

Please indicate areas where you would like to serve the OAC:
- Serve on an OAC committee
- Help fundraise
- Advocacy
- Educational outreach

Payment Information
Enclosed is my check (payable to the OAC) for $ ____________.

Please charge my credit card for my membership fee:
- Discover®
- MasterCard®
- Visa®
- Amex®

Please sign me up for auto-renewal so my membership will automatically renew each year (only for credit card transactions).

Credit Card Number: _______________________
Expiration Date: _______________________
Billing Zip Code: _______________________

JOIN NOW
Complete the membership application now! Or, just scan the code to the left using your barcode scanner app on your smartphone! For more information, visit the OAC Web site at www.obesityaction.org.

Building a Coalition of those Affected

The OAC is the ONLY non profit organization whose sole focus is helping those affected by obesity. The OAC is a great place to turn if you are looking for a way to get involved and give back to the cause of obesity.

There are a variety of ways that you can make a difference, but the first-step is to become an OAC Member. The great thing about OAC membership is that you can be as involved as you would like. Simply being a member contributes to the cause of obesity.

Why YOU Should Become an OAC Member
Quite simply, because the voice of those affected needs to be built! The OAC not only provides valuable public education on obesity, but we also conduct a variety of advocacy efforts. With advocacy, our voice must be strong. And, membership is what gives the OAC its strong voice.

Membership Categories and Benefits
The OAC wants YOU to be a part of what we do. No matter how you’re impacted, having individuals join our efforts who believe in making a difference is essential. That’s why the OAC offers various member categories, so you can get involved at your desired level.

Several valuable benefits also accompany your OAC membership. Each membership category offers something different. Here are some of the core benefits to membership:

- Official welcome letter and membership card
- Annual subscription to the OAC’s magazine
- Subscription to the OAC’s members-only monthly electronic newsletter
- Periodic member alerts informing you of issues that need action/attention
- Ability to lend your voice to the cause
- Representation through advocacy

Mail to: OAC
4511 North Himes Ave., Ste. 250
Tampa, FL 33614

Or Fax to: (813) 873-7838