



More water for keeping stones out of kidneys

Self Care principal adviser and spokesperson John Bell

The urinary tract is our body's plumbing, filtration and liquid waste disposal system; and it's critical to health and well being. The recent "Wee Week" organised by Kidney Health Australia has once again stressed the need keep our insides well hydrated to ensure we have a healthy urinary tract, free from infection.

Better hydration (drinking sufficient fluid) will also help prevent the formation of kidney stones; and whilst steak and kidneys normally go well together, stones in kidneys are definitely things to be avoided. These hard rock-like crystals can vary in size from as small as a grain of sand to as big as a golf ball.

Not surprisingly, pain is often the first sign of a kidney stone – gripping pain in the back just below the ribs, sometimes spreading to the front of the body and towards the groin. Other symptoms can include blood in the urine, nausea and vomiting, and sweating and fever.

Kidney stones are one of the commonest conditions affecting the urinary tract with the lifetime risk of developing kidney stones about 1 in 10 for men and 1 in 35 for women. The cause is sometimes difficult to determine. Often there are high levels in the urine of certain chemicals such as calcium, oxalate, cystine and uric acid; but stones can also form when levels of these substances are normal.

Even more common than kidney stones are urinary tract infections, generally called simply UTIs. And with these kidney problems, more women than men are affected.

UTIs can involve just about any part of the urinary tract. The kidneys and the bladder can be affected, as can the ureter and the urethra – the "pipes" which carry urine to and from the bladder.

Source: sxc.hu / Adam Ciesielski



Bacteria which normally live harmlessly in the intestine or the bowel are the usual suspects for causing UTIs. If these bacteria manage to spread from the anus (the back passage) into the urethra and then further into the urinary system, they can cause some rather nasty and discomforting conditions.

Urethritis is the medical term describing the infection when just the urethra is affected. If the infection spreads to the bladder causing the bladder lining to become raw and inflamed the condition is known as cystitis; whereas pyelonephritis is the name for the infection if it spreads to the kidneys.

Kidney related infections are potentially very serious and need prompt treatment to avoid kidney damage.

Women, generally, are more likely than men to suffer with UTIs because the urethra is so short. Also, female hormones can affect urine acidity making it more likely the offending organisms can thrive. Older people, or people with another chronic medical condition such as diabetes, where the immune system is already under stress, are also be more likely to get UTIs.

The Pharmaceutical Society (PSA) has produced a Urinary Tract Infection card which has some self help hints on how to reduce the risk of urinary tract infections. And it starts with drinking enough water. There's no specific amount to drink each day – it will vary from person to person; a good guide is sufficient to satisfy your thirst. However, beware carbonated drinks containing phosphoric acid. They may make some kidney stones more likely.

Most importantly, if you think you have a UTI and the simple non-prescription products are not successful, see your doctor promptly. An appropriate antibiotic will usually give the desired results quickly and safely. And you'll avoid any possible serious consequences.

Meanwhile, if you would like more information about UTIs and kidney stones, check out the Kidney Health website at www.kidney.org.au, or call into your local Self Care Pharmacy for a UTI fact card. For the nearest location phone PSA on 1300 369 772 or click on *Self Care* then *Find a Self Care Pharmacy* at www.psa.org.au.