

LIFE WITH A SINGLE KIDNEY



HOW COMMON IS IT?

About 1 person out of every 750 is born with a single kidney, a condition called renal agenesis. It is more common in males and the left kidney is more likely to be missing.

Sometimes a kidney is removed because there is a blockage, a tumour or damage caused by an accident. The operation to remove a kidney is called a nephrectomy. People with a kidney transplant and live kidney donors also have only one working kidney. See the *Kidney Transplant* and *Live Donation* fact sheets for more information.

HOW IS KIDNEY FUNCTION AFFECTED?

Your kidneys are located under the ribcage near the middle of your back. Each kidney is about the size of your fist and weighs around 150 grams.

If you are born with one kidney or lose a kidney your remaining kidney gets bigger and heavier. It works harder and provides up to 75% of normal kidney function rather than the expected 50%.

CAN I PLAY SPORT?

If you have one kidney it is important to be aware of the injuries that can be caused by contact sports using direct blows or collisions, such as kickboxing, football and karate. Your single kidney is more at risk because it is larger and heavier. Think carefully about the possible effects of damaging your kidney when choosing a sport. Get advice from your doctor if you are unsure.

HOW DO I CHECK MY KIDNEY HEALTH?

If you have a single kidney you are unlikely to have kidney problems, particularly in the first few years. These are some ways to check your kidney function:

- **Blood Pressure:** Your kidneys help to control blood pressure by making a hormone called renin. After several years you may have slightly raised blood pressure so it is important to have it checked regularly.
- **Protein in the Urine:** Too much protein in your urine can be a sign of a kidney problem. Your doctor can check your urine using a simple dipstick test.
- **Glomerular Filtration Rate (GFR):** The GFR measures how well your kidneys filter the wastes from your blood and is the best measure of kidney function. It helps to determine if there is any kidney damage. GFR is lower if you have one kidney.



As long as these conditions are checked for and/or kept under control, they are unlikely to affect your health. They are more common if you have a single kidney from birth or early childhood. The decrease in kidney function is usually mild and life span is normal.

It is important to ask your doctor for regular kidney health checks. If you have a new doctor, tell them about your single kidney.

If your kidney health check shows changes to your kidney function, treatment can increase the life of your kidney. Medication and changes to lifestyle plus an early referral to a kidney specialist can slow down any reduction of kidney function but will not reverse damage.

DO I NEED TO MAKE LIFESTYLE CHANGES?

Everybody needs to make healthy life style choices, particularly if you have one kidney. Healthy lifestyle choices include:

- Eating plenty of vegetables/fruit, grains and low-fat dairy foods as well as reducing saturated fats and salt
- Regular physical activity for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Drinking plenty of water
- Being a non-smoker
- Drinking alcohol in moderation. This is no more than 2 standard drinks per day for men and 1 for women plus 2 alcohol free days per week.

Usually there are no special requirements during pregnancy and special diets are generally not needed.

For more information about kidneys health or this topic, please contact Kidney Health Australia: Kidney Information Line (free call) on 1800 682 531 or visit website www.kidney.org.au

This is intended as a general introduction to this topic and is not meant to substitute for your doctor's or Health Professional's advice. All care is taken to ensure that the information is relevant to the reader and applicable to each state in Australia. It should be noted that Kidney Health Australia recognises that each person's experience is individual and that variations do occur in treatment and management due to personal circumstances, the health professional and the state one lives in. Should you require further information always consult your doctor or health professional.

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