Kidney Function is Important
The kidneys have many important functions in the body – regulating fluid, thinning blood, removing wastes, balancing minerals and balancing pH. Indirectly, the kidneys give strong bones and teeth, and stabilise your nervous system. In Ayurveda, the kidneys are linked to skin, perspiration, blood sugar balance, fat metabolism and expel excess heat from the body.

In Ayurveda and Western science, unhappy kidneys can cause a myriad of problems – kidney stones, weak bones (osteoporosis, fractures, arthritis), weak teeth (chips, cracks, cavities), mineral deposits (bone spurs, hardened arteries), swelling, blood pressure problems, heart problems, anxiety, insomnia, nervousness, overacidity, bad breath, smelly perspiration, skin rashes and diabetes.

So as you can see, it pays to care for your kidneys.

Go When You Need to Go
A very important principle in Ayurveda is known as ‘Natural Urges’ – sleeping, crying, sneezing, breathing, belching, yawning, vomiting, eating, drinking, urinating, ejaculating, defecating and passing wind.

Embarrassing as it may seem, if any of these urges are suppressed or ignored, even temporarily, it can have dire effects on your health. It is always healthy to allow the body to sleep when it needs to sleep, drink when it needs to drink, and in this case – urinate when it needs to urinate. The adverse effects of holding on when you should go are difficult painful urination, bladder pain, backache, headache, damaged urinary and nervous systems.
Begin paying attention to your body’s need to pass urine and frequency. As soon as you begin to feel the urge, start looking for your nearest rest-room; and don’t wait until your “busting” like my son does. Urinating every three hours is optimal; more or less often can be a warning sign. For example, too often may indicate diabetes, and too little can mean dehydration or that you have trained your body to ignore the signals.

Your Daily Routine

Begin the day by emptying your bladder, first thing in the morning. Follow with a large glass of fresh filtered water, maybe with a squeeze of lemon, this will give your kidneys a wake up and aid digestion. Throughout the day, ensure you “go when you need to go”. You may want to keep a diary for a few weeks to check your frequency.

End the day by emptying the bladder again, just before sleep. This simply makes sure that the body holds the urine for the smallest amount of time possible during the night.

I have also heard that sleeping on your left side for a while, then on your right side for a while (or vice versa) will lessen the load a little for each kidney during the night, by reducing the amount of work the kidneys needs to do to pump urine through.

Your Diet

This is by far the most important factor in most of today’s kidney disorders and is very easy to fix. This is the diet I give to clients who I feel are at risk of kidney stones, or anyone who wants to care for their kidneys, bones and teeth.

Avoid the following foods which create acidity and/or mineral imbalance in the body. The kidneys pull minerals into the blood to alkalise or rebalance the body’s minerals, weakening bones and teeth, and causing gradual calcium build up in blood vessels and kidneys. This can eventually lead to kidney stones and heart problems.

- Carbonated drinks, alcohol, coffee, tea and sugar are best cut out entirely. Alcohol, coffee and tea also dehydrate the body, adversely affecting kidneys. Herbal teas are safe. To find out more about this and how to cut out sugar, read Nancy Appleton’s excellent book, *Lick the Sugar Habit*.  
- Spinach, rhubarb and chocolate should be eaten in moderation due to oxalic acid content. Spinach is best eaten well cooked to remove as much acid as possible.  
- Processed foods and food additives.  
- Common table salt. Choose a natural unrefined salt and avoid salty foods, particularly processed foods with added salt (or sodium).

Kidney Herbs and Foods for your Daily Diet

Some good foods to add to your diet for strengthening kidneys:

- Watermelon (eat the seeds too), watermelon seed tea  
- Barley, corn  
- Cornsilk tea, dandelion and/or burdock tea or coffee  
- Parsley and dandelion greens  
- Asparagus, karela (bitter melon)  
- Coriander, cardamon, cumin and fennel seeds, turmeric (cooling – for use in inflammation or excess heat)  
- Cinnamon, garlic, fenugreek, turmeric, radish seed, mustard seed, celery seed or ajwain (warming – for use in coldness or excess fluids)  
- Lemongrass

**Please note:** If you have a kidney problem already, it is vital that you consult an expert before trying any of these remedies.

Water

No article on kidney health would be complete without reminding you of the importance of drinking water. However, there are some important factors to consider.

1. Drink good quality filtered water. Unless your tap water comes from a clean underground spring, you should always drink well-filtered water, and have it tested for mineral balance and acidity. Hills Laboratories in Hamilton provide a water-testing service.

2. It is normally recommended that we drink between one and a half to two litres of water per day. But every individual is different and some body types such as Vata need far more water than others. Plus, our body knows how much water it needs, we simply need to drink when we are thirsty and not when we aren’t thirsty. Forcing yourself to drink is not healthy.

3. Diet also influences water needs. A person who consumes dehydrating substances such as alcohol, certain drugs, coffee, tea, salt or dry/dried foods, will need much more water than someone who lives on watermelons, fruit, cucumbers and salads. Drinking smoothies, juices, milk drinks, yoghurts or eating soups will also lessen your daily water needs.

4. Warm or room temperature drinks are far better for your body and kidneys than cold or iced drinks.

5. Be aware of dehydration. To test, pinch the skin on the back of your hand, then let go. If you are well-hydrated, the skin will zip back to normal quickly. If you are dehydrated it will take its time getting back to normal. In older people it is normal to take a little longer, but this is still a good test overall. Another obvious sign is dry lips, mouth, skin and nasal membranes, or constipation.

**Please note:** If you have an existing kidney problem, you will need to follow the advice of your health practitioner regarding water consumption.
Metaphysical Function

On a mind-body-spirit level, the kidneys relate to the emotions of fear and anxiety. These emotions weaken the kidneys and can cause kidney problems. If you suffer from these emotions find a way to overcome them. Suppressing or ignoring your feelings is not healthy. It is best to find and remove the causes of these feelings while supporting the nervous system with calming supplements like B-Vitamins, Bach flowers and anti-anxiety herbs such as chamomile, skullcap and valerian.

early warning signs

If you haven’t had a Chinese or Ayurvedic Practitioner check your pulse to assess the health of your kidneys, you should pay extra attention to these early warning signs of unhappy kidneys. Those marked with an (*) are also early warning signs for diabetes.

Treating your kidneys when you see these early warning signs is your best bet, according to Ayurveda, for preventing the development of diabetes or kidney disease.

Yolande is an experienced Natural Therapist specialising in Nutrition, Ayurvedic Medicine and Ayurvedic Body Therapies as well as author, teacher and creator of ‘Yolande’s Natural Herbal Products’. She is an Angel Intuitive™ certified by Doreen Virtue, and currently lives and works in Tauranga, New Zealand.

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