

## How kidney disease causes chain reaction of health woes

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THE kidneys are small, bean-shaped organs only about five inches big, but don't let their small size fool you. Sitting just below the rib cage, they are a complex filter system that processes around 200 liters of blood, removes impurities, regulates blood pressure, maintains electrolyte balance, and produces hormones crucial for red blood cell production and bone health. Whew, what a fantastic job they do every single day.



In other words, these fist-sized hardworking organs play a powerful role in maintaining our well-being, and having kidney problems can set off a domino effect of other health problems.

“Given all the work the kidneys must do, developing kidney issues like chronic kidney disease or CKD which affects one Filipino every hour puts you at risk of complications that affect other areas of your body like your skin and your heart,” explains Eladio Miguel M. Peñaranda Jr., MD Chief of the Section of Nephrology of the top hospital in the Philippines Makati Medical Center (MakatiMed).

Some people with malfunctioning kidneys do complain about itchy skin that can range from mildly bothersome to unbearably lifedisrupting, and gout too.

“There are many possible reasons why people with kidney problems experience this, and it could be because there’s an accumulation of toxins in the body,” shares Dr. Peñaranda. “The same excess waste buildup also leads to uric acid build up in your blood that triggers gout. Having too much uric acid creates small urate crystals, which settle in your joints and cause sudden attacks of pain and swelling.”

With the kidney controlling the balance of minerals like phosphorus, calcium, and potassium in the body, problems in these organs may also affect bone and heart health.

“Healthy kidneys can easily get rid of excess phosphorus. Otherwise, high levels of this mineral can also decrease the calcium levels in bone, making you more at risk of fractures and osteoporosis,” says Dr. Peñaranda. “Moreover, potassium controls the electrical signals of your myocardium or the muscular layer of the heart controlling your heartbeat. When there’s too much potassium it can result in an irregular heartbeat.”

Similarly, kidney damage increases the risk for more serious health issues like heart disease, which remains the leading cause of death among Filipinos. “This is because kidney disease can lead to increased strain on the heart as it works harder to supply blood to the kidneys,” notes Dr. Peñaranda.

Considering their impact and influence on the rest of the body, these small organs should always be factored into our proactive approach to maintaining health, MakatiMed reminds. Some people with kidney disease don't feel its effects until the condition reaches an advanced stage when treatment only involves alleviating symptoms and slowing down the progression of the disease. “To keep kidneys healthy, it’s crucial to add more veggies and fruits to your plate, stay hydrated, work out regularly, limit cholesterol and salt intake, reduce alcohol consumption, quit smoking, and control blood sugar and blood pressure,” underlines Dr. Peñaranda.

“If you suspect kidney issues, see a doctor immediately and ask if you can get tested. Diagnosis requires blood and urine tests. Taking these steps can preserve your kidneys and prevent a surge of health issues that’ll keep you from living life to the fullest,” concludes Dr. Peñaranda.