March is National Kidney Month. March 15 is World Kidney Day. Most Americans know that heart disease and cancer can be silent killers—and understand that monitoring blood pressure and cholesterol and having regular mammograms are critical to protecting their health. Too few adults—and not enough doctors—realize however, that chronic kidney disease (CKD) is another common, life-threatening illness that often goes undetected until very advanced when it could be diagnosed early through simple tests. Studies report that 26 million Americans suffer from CKD and millions more are at risk. Worse, today’s epidemics of diabetes and obesity could contribute to even higher rates of CKD in the future. Caught early, CKD can often be managed and kidney damage can be slowed or stopped, which is why early testing for those at risk is important.

In preparation for National Kidney Month, the National Kidney Foundation (NKF) offers a 6-step primer for protecting health.

Step 1: Know These Facts

6 Things Healthy Kidneys Do:
- Regulate the body’s fluid levels
- Filter wastes and toxins from the blood
- Release a hormone that regulates blood pressure
- Activate Vitamin D to maintain healthy bones
- Keep blood minerals in balance
- Release the hormone that directs production of red blood cells

8 Problems CKD Can Cause:
- Cardiovascular disease
- Heart attack and stroke
- High blood pressure
- Death
- Weak bones
- Nerve damage (neuropathy)
- Kidney failure (end-stage renal disease, or ESRD)
- Anemia or low red blood cell count

Step 2: Assess Your Risk

4 Main Risk Factors:
- Diabetes (self or family)
- High blood pressure (self or family)
- Cardiovascular disease (self or family)
- Family history of kidney disease or diabetes or high blood pressure

10 Additional Risk Factors:
- African-American, Native-American, Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander heritage
- Age 60 or older
- Obesity
- Low birth weight
- Prolonged use of NSAIDs, a type of painkillers such as ibuprofen and naproxen
- Lupus, other autoimmune disorders
- Chronic urinary tract infections
- Kidney stones

Step 3: Recognize Symptoms

Most people with early CKD have no symptoms, which is why early testing is critical. By the time symptoms appear, CKD may be advanced, and symptoms can be misleading. Pay attention to these:

8 Possible Trouble Signs:
- Fatigue, weakness
- Difficult, painful urination
- Foamy urine
- Pink, dark urine (blood in urine)
- Puffy eyes
- Swollen face, hands, abdomen, ankles, feet
- Increased thirst
- Increased need to urinate (especially at night)

Step 4: Get Tested

If you or a loved one belong to a high-risk group, ask your primary-care physician about these tests—and be especially insistent about the last one. Your doctor may want to perform other tests as well.

4 Simple, Life-Saving Tests:

What: Blood Pressure
Why: High blood pressure can damage small blood vessels (glomeruli) in the kidneys. It is the second-leading cause of kidney failure after diabetes.

Good Score: Below 140/90 is good for most people. Below 130/80 is better if you have chronic kidney disease. Below 120/80 is best.

What: Protein in Urine
Why: Traces of a type of protein, albumin in urine (albuminuria) is an early sign of CKD. Persistent amounts of albumin and other proteins in the urine (proteinuria) indicate kidney damage.

Good Score: Less than 30 mg of albumin per gram of urinary creatinine (a normal waste product)

Step 5: Stay Healthy

6 Things People with CKD Should Do:
- Lower high blood pressure
- Keep blood-sugar levels under control if diabetic
- Reduce salt intake
- Avoid NSAIDs, a type of painkillers
- Moderate protein consumption
- Get an annual flu shot

9 Things Everyone Should Do:
- Exercise regularly
- Control weight
- Follow a balanced diet
- Quit smoking
- Drink only in moderation
- Stay hydrated
- Monitor cholesterol levels
- Get an annual physical
- Know your family medical history

Step 6: Learn More

To learn more about chronic kidney disease and/or risk factors, contact the National Kidney Foundation at www.kidney.org or (800) 622-9010.
Weight Loss Tips the SMART Way

With spring just around the corner, it’s a perfect time to start reducing some of the weight you may have picked up during the winter months.

Be a SMART planner! SMART means being Specific, Measured, Appropriate, Realistic and Time-bound about what you plan to achieve. For example, if your goal is to increase your physical activity, then write down the type of activity you plan to do, how many times you can realistically do it each week, and for how long each time. Start with small, short and easier goals, and work your way up.

Keep an eye on the size! Did you know that we eat most of what is on our plate, no matter what the size of the plate? When at home, try using smaller plates; they will help you take smaller portions. When eating out, share an entrée! Studies show that portions today are often super-sized—enough for two or more people to share.

Make yourself an offer you can’t refuse. Before starting to reach your next goal, offer yourself a promise like this, “If I reach my goal this (day, week, month), I will treat myself to a well-deserved (fill in a reward here but not a food reward).” Think of something you want such as an afternoon off, a massage, a movie, or even a deposit toward a larger reward. Be creative, set up rewards for yourself frequently, and make sure you give them to yourself when you reach your goal.

How much is enough activity? You need to get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity per day, most days of the week to help burn up extra calories. But give yourself credit for the activities that you’re already doing. Common activities such as climbing stairs, pushing a stroller, gardening and walking all count as physical activity. Just make sure you do enough of them.

Balance your (food) checkbook. Keep a diary of what you eat and how much physical activity you get each day. Then, at the end of each week, record your weight in the same diary. You and your health provider can use this information to adjust your eating and physical activity plan to find the best way to reach your goal.

Am I full yet? The question may take longer to answer than you think. It takes 15 minutes or more for the message that we’re full to get from our stomachs to our brains. So take a few minutes before digging in for that next helping. Having trouble feeling full? Eight 8 oz.-glasses or more of water or other non-caloric beverages daily fills you up and keeps you refreshed. Also, vegetables and fruits can help you feel fuller, especially when eaten raw.

Roasted Brussels Sprouts with Lemon and Parmesan

Cooking spray
1 1/2 lbs. Brussels sprouts
2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
1/2 tsp. salt
1/8 tsp ground black pepper
1 oz. chunk Parmesan or Asiago cheese for shaving
Chopped parsley, as desired
1/2 lemon, cut into wedges

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Coat a baking sheet with cooking spray.

Remove the tough outer leaves from the Brussels sprouts. Trim off the stem end of each and cut in half. Scoop the sliced Brussels sprouts into a mixing bowl. Add the oil, salt and pepper, and using your hands, toss until the sprouts are well-coated. Spread the sprouts on the prepared baking sheet.

Roast the Brussels sprouts for 25-30 minutes, stirring once. Remove from oven and let sit for 10 minutes.

Spread the roasted sprouts on a small serving platter. Using a cheese parer or the widest holes on a box grater, shave the cheese into curls or chips. Sprinkle the cheese and parsley over the roasted sprouts just before serving. Serve with lemon wedges. Makes 6 servings.

Per serving: 97 calories, 6 g total fat (1 g saturated fat), 8 g carbohydrate, 5 g protein, 3g dietary fiber, 292 mg sodium.

The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) is the cancer charity that fosters research on the relationship of nutrition, physical activity and weight management to cancer risk, interprets the scientific literature and educates the public about the results. It has contributed more than $91 million for innovative research conducted at universities, hospitals and research centers across the country. AICR also provides a wide range of educational programs to help millions of Americans learn to make dietary changes for lower cancer risk. Its award-winning New American Plate program is presented in brochures, seminars and on its website, www.aicr.org. AICR is a member of the World Cancer Research Fund International.