

Health Awareness

Millions At Risk For Kidney Disease And Don't Know It

(NAPSA)—Kidney disease affects nearly 20 million Americans. Millions more are at risk but don't know it. In 2000, about the same number of people died with kidney failure as of breast cancer and prostate cancer combined.

Diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney failure. A family history of kidney failure also increases risk.

"Most people are unaware of the connection between their diabetes or high blood pressure and kidney disease," says Dr. Thomas Hostetter, director of the National Kidney Disease Education Program (NKDEP). "It's important for people at risk to get their kidneys tested and take steps to protect their kidney function."

According to the NKDEP, an education and awareness initiative of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), if you have diabetes, high blood pressure—or if your mother, father, sister or brother developed kidney failure—you are at increased risk of kidney disease and should talk to your doctor about getting tested.

"Don't wait for symptoms," says Dr. Hostetter. "Kidney disease strikes without warning. It often has no symptoms until just before the kidneys fail. People find themselves in the emergency room or on dialysis before they even know they have a problem."

However, kidney failure, which requires dialysis or a kidney transplant, can be prevented.

Here's what you can do to protect your kidneys:

• **Control your diabetes and high blood pressure.** Control-



Kidney disease can be effectively treated if detected early.

ling these conditions can help reduce the stress on your heart and blood vessels, which contributes to kidney disease.

• **Talk to your health care provider.** Discuss your risk for kidney disease, testing, and how you can keep your kidneys healthy.

• **Get tested.** Ask your doctor to test your blood and urine for signs of kidney disease. The tests are simple, and are the only way to know for sure if you have kidney disease.

• **Get treated.** If the tests show that you have kidney disease, medications are available to help slow its progression or prevent kidney failure altogether. Your doctor may also want you to see a kidney specialist.

"Ten years ago, dialysis was inevitable for people with kidney disease," says Dr. Hostetter. "But, because of medications available today, it's a different story. That's why it's so important for those at risk to get tested."

To learn more, call toll free 1-866-4-KIDNEY or visit www.nkdep.nih.gov/kidneymonth.

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Note to Editor: March is National Kidney Month.

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