



What is Glomerulonephritis (GN) ?

Your kidneys contain 1 million filters called “glomeruli”. The glomerulus does the work of the kidneys – cleaning toxins from the blood, and preventing cells and protein from spilling into the urine.

Glomerulonephritis means the filters of both kidneys have become inflamed. There are several conditions that fall in this category.

Why all of the complicated names?

A kidney biopsy (a tiny sample of kidney tissue) is often needed to make the diagnosis.

The GN conditions are named after the pattern that doctors see when they look at the kidney tissue under the microscope.

What causes GN?

An underlying infection (ex. Hepatitis), medication exposure, or immune disease (ex. Lupus) can cause GN. You will likely undergo a series of tests (blood tests, xray) to make sure that there is no specific cause that can be identified. Most GNs do not run in families.

Most often, GN develops for unknown reasons without an underlying trigger. Because GN is relatively rare, there is a lot that we do not understand about why they develop. Many patients recall a cold or flu just before they were diagnosed but often we never pinpoint the exact cause.

Many types of GN likely relate to problems turning off the body’s immune system. The immune system helps fight off infection, but sometimes the immune responses can harm the glomeruli.

What are the signs of GN?

Many of the signs of GN are silent and can only be detected by blood and urine tests. It is important to monitor these tests with your doctor!

“Edema” means swelling and it can be a sign of GN. Swelling can mean that extra salt and water are being retained by the kidneys.



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“Hypertension” means high blood pressure. People do not usually know when blood pressure is high because it cannot be felt. It can only be confirmed with a blood pressure measurement.

“Proteinuria” refers to protein spilling in the urine. Higher levels create bubbles in the urine.

“Hematuria” means blood in the urine. It can be invisible or turn the urine red in colour.

“Creatinine” is a blood test that used to estimate how well the kidneys are cleaning. Lower values mean the better the healthier kidneys.

Cholesterol levels are often high in the blood of people with GN.

What are the treatment options?

These fall into two categories:

1 – Treatments that do not affect the immune system: These include medicines to control blood pressure, manage swelling, and lower cholesterol. Stopping smoking and healthy lifestyle choices also protect kidneys.

2 – Immune system lowering treatment: These medicines lower the body’s immune system so that it does not attack the glomeruli. These medicines can have more side effects such as infections, and need to be carefully dosed and monitored.

How about my diet?

Your diet did not cause your kidney disease and changes in the diet have not been shown to cure GN. However, some changes in diet (ex. Lowering salt) can definitely help with GN and treatment side effects. Ask your doctor!

What can happen to people with GN?

Sometimes GN can permanently scar the kidneys and cause the kidneys to work less effectively (chronic kidney disease) or stop cleaning the blood (kidney failure). People with GN are also at higher risk of having infections and blood clots.



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Is there any hope?

Yes! We have many treatments for GN, and our goal is to try to prevent kidney failure and keep you healthy. There are large networks of researchers studying GN and new medicines to treat these conditions. Participation in a research study is always optional but can be a rewarding experience. Ask your doctors about how you can help these efforts to discover cures for GN!