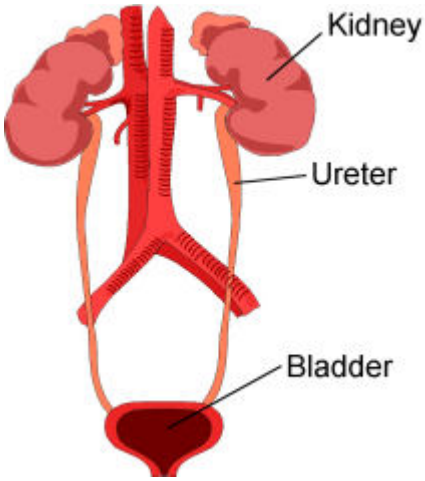
Glomerulonephritis

Your kidneys are two bean-shaped, fist-sized organs located at the small of your back, just below your rib cage. One is located on each side of your spine. Glomerulonephritis is a form of kidney disease that can rapidly or slowly damage the small working units (*glomeruli*) inside the kidneys. Glomerulonephritis is an inflammation of the working units. The glomeruli help filter waste and fluids from the blood. These wastes are put out in the urine. This disease leads to a rapid loss of kidney function so they can no longer get rid of the wastes. This can lead to a dangerous buildup of waste products in your bloodstream.



Glomerulonephritis can be part of another disease, such as lupus or diabetes. It can also be a disease by itself. This is called primary glomerulonephritis.

CAUSES

The cause may be unknown. A few of the causes are:

- Diabetes, which is one of the most common causes.
- Glomerulonephritis caused by a strep infection. Strep infections should be treated rapidly.
- Viral and *bacterial* (germ infections).
- Immune problems.
- Inflammation of the blood vessels from other causes.
- High blood pressure.

SYMPTOMS

Early in this disease, it shows up as red blood cells and protein in your urine. There may also be anemia. A little later, other problems may show up. Signs and symptoms may include:

- Brownish colored urine.
- Foam in the toilet water when you are passing your water.
- High blood pressure.
- Fluid retention. This shows up as swelling in your face, hands, feet and ankles.
- Feeling tired or fatigued.
- Less frequent urination than usual.

DIAGNOSIS

Blood and urine tests, specialized x-rays, and sometimes a biopsy all help your caregiver know what is wrong.

TREATMENT

Treatment and outcome depends on the type, cause and stage of the disease.

- Medications may be used to treat high blood pressure and slow the decreased urine production.
- Other medications may be used to treat the cause once known.
- If kidney failure is present, dialysis may be used temporarily. Dialysis is the artificial kidney used to filter and clean the blood. If the kidneys fail completely and do not return to normal, a kidney transplant may be necessary.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Your caregiver may recommend changes in your diet. This may include cutting salt intake. This will cut down on swelling and high blood pressure.
- Cutting back on protein and potassium in your diet may slow the buildup of wastes in your blood.
- Diabetics should maintain a healthy weight, control blood sugar levels and blood pressure. This may help

slow kidney damage.

COMPLICATIONS

- Sudden or long term kidney failure.
- High blood pressure.
- Nephrotic syndrome which is a condition of loss of protein in your urine. This causes low protein levels in the blood, high serum cholesterol, and swelling of the eyelids, feet and abdomen. Other problems can include:
  - Heart failure, fluid in your lungs, and swelling of your face, feet, ankles, and belly.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have a new onset of blood in your urine, or the amount of blood in your urine increases.
- You develop shortness of breath or chest pain.
- You cough up any frothy or bloody sputum.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Adapted from information from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

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