WHAT DOES THAT WORD MEAN?

Ever wondered about the meaning of that new word that the doctor or nurse used? Below is a list of words and their meanings that may help.

A

Abdomen: The area of the body that contains the pancreas, stomach, intestines, liver, gallbladder and other organs.

Acute Kidney (Renal) Failure: A sudden drop in kidney function that is often short-lived and can require dialysis. For those with previously healthy kidneys, it seldom means staying on dialysis. Also known as Acute Kidney (Renal) Disease.

Albumin: A protein in your blood plasma. In the blood, albumin acts as a carrier and helps to maintain blood volume and blood pressure. (See Protein)

Albuminuria: Occurs when albumin is present in the urine. There are filters in the kidneys that prevent large molecules, such as albumin, from passing through. If these filters are damaged, albumin passes from the blood into the urine. (See Microalbuminuria, Macroalbuminuria, Proteinuria)

Albumin:creatinine ratio (ACR): This test compares the amount of albumin in the urine with the amount of creatinine. It is used to detect whether albuminuria is present. (See Albuminuria, Creatinine, Microalbuminuria, Macroalbuminuria)

Anaemia: Occurs when there is only a small number of red blood cells in the blood or the blood cells are not working properly. Red blood cells carry oxygen, so someone with anaemia can feel weak, tired and short of breath.

Antibodies: Are made by the immune system, your body's protection mechanism, to attack tissue that is not normally part of the body, for example bacteria or toxins.

Automated Peritoneal Dialysis (APD): See CCPD

Arterio-venous fistula: See Fistula

Artery: A large blood vessel that takes blood from the heart to other parts of the body.

B

Bladder: A muscular, elastic sac or membrane inside the body that stores the urine.

Blood group: Blood groups are classified by the ABO system (A, B, AB and O). In any of the 4 ABO groups, a person can be Rh positive or Rh negative, meaning that a person's blood can be classified as one of 8 possible types (O+, O-, A+, A-, B+, B-, AB+, AB-). Classifying blood type is important for working out compatibility for blood transfusions and organ transplantation.

Blood vessels: The tubes that take blood around the body.

C

Calcium: The most common mineral in the body. Calcium is essential for healthy bones and teeth. It is also important for regulating heart function, blood clotting, and muscle functioning, such as contraction and relaxation. Calcium levels are often abnormal in people with kidney disease. Raised calcium levels may cause headaches, nausea, sore eyes, aching teeth, itchy skin, mood changes, and confusion.

Cardiovascular disease (CVD): Includes all diseases and conditions of the heart and blood vessels, such as arteries and veins. The most common diseases and conditions include heart attack, heart failure, stroke, blockages in the blood vessels, and vascular kidney disease.

Catheter: A plastic tube that is used to take fluid in or out of the body. (See Vascular access catheter)

Central venous catheter: See Vascular access catheter

Cholesterol: A naturally-occurring waxy substance made by the body. It is an essential building block of cell membranes, hormones and vitamin D. Too much cholesterol in the blood can cause clogging of the arteries and lead to cardiovascular disease. (See Lipids, Low-density lipoprotein, High-density lipoprotein, Total cholesterol)

Chronic Kidney (Renal) Disease (CKD): A term used widely to describe kidney damage or reduced kidney function (irrespective of the cause) that persists for more than 3 months. Sometimes CKD leads to kidney failure, which requires dialysis or a kidney transplant to keep you alive.

Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis (CAPD): A type of dialysis where a special fluid is put into the peritoneal cavity (abdomen) through a soft, plastic tube (catheter), and then drained out a few hours later. This is usually done 3 or 4 times during the day to clean the blood.

Continuous Cycling Peritoneal Dialysis (CCPD): Very similar to CAPD but the fluid is moved in and out of the body continuously by a machine, usually overnight. Also called Automated Peritoneal Dialysis (APD).

Creatinine: Waste that is made by the breakdown of muscles. It is usually removed from the blood by the kidneys and passes out in the urine. When the kidneys aren't working very well, the creatinine stays in the blood and its measured level is elevated.

D

Diabetes: Is a chronic disease caused by problems with the production and/or action of insulin in the body.

Dialyser: Part of a dialysis machine that acts like a kidney to filter blood and remove waste products and excess fluid.

Dialysis: A treatment for kidney failure that removes waste products and excess fluid from the blood by filtering the blood through a special membrane. There are two types of dialysis; haemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis. (See Haemodialysis, Peritoneal Dialysis, Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis, Continuous Cycling Peritoneal Dialysis)

Dialysis fluid/dialysate: Special fluid that is used during dialysis to help clean the waste and excess fluid from the blood.

Donor: A person who gives a body organ, such as a kidney, to another person. For kidneys, the donor can be living or deceased.

E

eGFR: Estimated glomerular filtration rate. (See Glomerular Filtration Rate)

End Stage Kidney (Renal) Disease (ESKD): The stage of kidney disease when a person's kidneys have stopped working and treatment, such as dialysis or a transplant, is needed to sustain life. Also referred to as End Stage Kidney (Renal) Failure (ESKF) or stage 5 CKD.

Erythropoietin (EPO): A body chemical (hormone) mainly made by the kidneys that causes the bone marrow to make red blood cells. A lack of this hormone can cause anaemia.

Exchange: One complete treatment cycle of peritoneal dialysis.

F

Fistula: Produced when a vein and an artery in the arm or leg are joined together in an operation to make it easier to move blood in and out of the body during haemodialysis. Also known as an arterio-venous fistula.

Fluid allowance/restriction: Is a limit or total amount of fluid taken daily that is usually set by a doctor.

Fluid retention: When your body does not get rid of enough liquid (water). This can cause swollen or puffy ankles, face or hands, or shortness of breath. Also known as oedema.

G

Glomerular filtration rate (GFR): GFR is the best measure of kidney function and helps to determine the stage of kidney disease. It shows how well the kidneys are cleaning the blood. GFR is reported in millilitres per minute. The GFR is usually worked out from the results of the creatinine blood test with age and gender. (See eGFR)

Glomerulus: A tiny set of blood vessels in the nephron.

Glycosylated haemoglobin: See HbA1C

Graft: Another type of access for haemodialysis that is used if the blood vessels cannot be used for a fistula. During surgery, an artery and a vein are joined together by soft tubing.

H

Haematuria (or blood in the urine): Occurs when red blood cells leak into the urine. It can turn urine a red or dark cola colour, which is visible to the eye or may only be found by a urine test (microscopic haematuria). Blood in the urine is a common sign of urinary tract infections but can also be the first sign of a problem with the kidneys or the bladder.

Haemodialysis: A treatment for kidney failure. The patient's blood is pumped through special tubing to a haemodialysis machine. The machine acts like a kidney, filtering waste products from the blood before returning it to the patient. Haemodialysis usually lasts for 4-6 hours and is done 3 or more times a week. Haemodialysis can be performed in a hospital or satellite centre, or at home. It can also be performed at night. (See Home dialysis, Nocturnal dialysis, Satellite centre)

Haemoglobin (Hb): The part of red blood cells that gives them their red colour and transports oxygen around the body.

HbA1c: Stands for glycosylated haemoglobin, which occurs when haemoglobin joins with glucose in the blood. The HbA1c test shows what a person's average blood glucose level was for the 2 to 3 months before the test. This can help determine how well a person's diabetes is being controlled over time.

Heparin: Added to the blood during haemodialysis to stop it from clotting (forming small lumps) and blocking the dialyser.

High-density lipoprotein (HDL cholesterol): Known as the 'good cholesterol'. The higher the amount of HDL cholesterol, the lower the risk of cardiovascular disease. (See Cholesterol)

Home dialysis: Dialysis performed at home. It includes peritoneal dialysis and haemodialysis. For home haemodialysis, special plumbing is installed in your house, and the quality of your water supply is tested. You can choose to dialyse during the day or at night while you sleep. (See Haemodialysis, Nocturnal Dialysis, Peritoneal Dialysis)

Hypertension: Another word for high blood pressure. High blood pressure can cause chronic kidney disease and chronic kidney disease can cause high blood pressure.

J

Jugular Vein: A large vein located in the side of the neck sometimes used to provide access for haemodialysis. (See Vascular access catheter)

K

Kidneys: Reddish, jelly bean-shaped body organs. Most people have two kidneys but people can live with one. The kidneys are in the lower back just under the bottom of the rib cage. A kidney is about the size of your fist. The kidneys are very important because they remove waste and excess fluid from the body and produce urine.

They also help to:

- control blood pressure
- produce red blood cells
- keep our bones strong
- maintain the chemical balance of the blood
- change Vitamin D so that the body can use it
- get rid of drugs and poisons

Kidney biopsy: A diagnostic test where a needle is used to remove a small piece of tissue from a kidney. A biopsy helps to determine the cause of kidney disease.

Kidney failure: See End Stage Kidney Disease

Kidney transplant: When a healthy kidney is taken from a person and surgically placed into someone with kidney failure. The kidney can come from a living or deceased donor. It is important to remember that a transplant is a treatment not a cure for kidney disease.

Kidney ultrasound scan: A probe is moved over the skin sending and receiving ultrasound signals, which then make pictures of the kidneys and bladder. This is a diagnostic test often used to measure the size of the kidneys.

L

Lipids: Fatty substances, including cholesterol and triglycerides, that are present in blood and body tissues. (See Cholesterol, Low-density lipoprotein, High-density lipoprotein, Total cholesterol)

Low-density lipoprotein (LDL cholesterol): Known as the 'bad cholesterol'. The higher the amount of LDL cholesterol, the higher the risk of cardiovascular disease. (See Cholesterol)

M

Membrane: A thin, elastic lining or sac connecting or covering parts of the body.
Microalbuminuria: Occurs when albumin, a kind of protein, leaks into the urine in very small or 'micro' amounts. The level can be measured by a special urine test, usually on a single urine sample. The occurrence of microalbuminuria may be the first sign of an otherwise silent kidney condition. A microalbuminuria test should be done at least yearly if you have diabetes. (See Albuminuria and Albumin:creatinine ratio)

Macroalbuminuria: Occurs when albumin, a kind of protein, leaks into the urine in larger or 'macro' amounts. (See Microalbuminuria)

N

Nephrologist: A doctor who specialises in kidney function.

Nephrology: The study of the kidneys.

Nephron: The tiny parts of the kidney that filter blood to make urine. There are over one million filters in each kidney.

Nocturnal haemodialysis: Haemodialysis performed at night while the patient is asleep. This is usually performed at the patient's home. (See Home Dialysis)

O

Oedema: See Fluid Retention

P

Parathyroid glands: Produce parathyroid hormone (PTH). PTH helps to control calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin D levels within the blood and bone. Kidney failure can cause the parathyroid glands to produce too much PTH.

Peritoneal cavity: The space in the abdomen (belly) holding the intestines and other organs.

Peritoneal Dialysis: A treatment for kidney failure where dialysis fluid is moved in and out of the peritoneal cavity to remove wastes and excess fluid from the blood. (See Continuous Ambulatory Peritoneal Dialysis, Continuous Cycling Peritoneal Dialysis)

Peritoneum: A very thin sac or membrane that surrounds the organs on the inside of the abdomen or peritoneal cavity.

Phosphate: A mineral that, together with calcium, keeps your bones strong and healthy. Too much phosphate causes itching and pain in the joints, such as the knees, elbows and ankles. When the kidneys are not functioning properly, high levels of phosphate accumulate in the blood.

Phosphate binder: If your phosphate level is too high, you may be prescribed medicine called phosphate binders. They combine with phosphate in your intestines so it can pass out of your body with the faeces (poo). It is important to take phosphate binders with your meals and snacks.

Potassium: An essential mineral that helps nerve endings and muscles to work. Potassium is usually removed by healthy kidneys. If your level of potassium is too high or too low, it can cause an irregular heartbeat. Very high potassium levels may cause the heart to stop.

Protein: A nutrient that you get from food that builds, repairs and maintains body tissue. It also helps to fight infections and heal wounds**.**
Proteinuria: Occurs when there are abnormal levels of protein in the urine. There are filters in the kidneys that prevent large molecules such as protein from passing through. If these filters are damaged, proteins pass from the blood into the urine. The most common protein found in the urine is albumin. The appearance of protein in the urine may be the first sign of an otherwise silent kidney condition.

R

Recipient: A person who receives a transplanted body organ, such as a kidney.

Renal: Another word for kidneys.

Renin: A chemical made by the kidneys that helps to control blood pressure.

S

Salt: Also called sodium. Affects the amount of fluid the body retains and increases thirst. If you have a kidney problem, too much salt can make you drink more than your kidneys can remove and may cause:

- high blood pressure
- swelling of ankles, feet, hands and puffiness under the eyes
- shortness of breath

Satellite centre: A dialysis unit that provides haemodialysis away from the hospital. This is an option when home dialysis is not appropriate and hospital dialysis is not required.

Sodium: A mineral in the body often called salt. The kidneys help to control the amount of sodium in the body. Sodium helps to control the amount of water in the body.

Steroid: A medicine that helps to stop allergic reactions. It is used to prevent the body from rejecting a transplanted organ.

Subclavian vein: A blood vessel found underneath the shoulder that is sometimes used for haemodialysis.

T

Tissue typing: A test to find out the level of compatibility or matching between the organs of a donor and a recipient. (See Blood group)

Tissue: A group of cells of the same type, such as a muscle.

Total cholesterol: A cholesterol measurement that indicates all the cholesterol molecules in the blood, including low-density lipoproteins (LDL), high-density lipoproteins (HDL), and very low-density lipoproteins (VLDL). (See Cholesterol, Lipids, Low-density lipoprotein, High-density lipoprotein)

U

Uraemia: A build-up of waste products in the blood causing nausea, vomiting, tiredness, and problems with concentration.

Urea: A waste product made as the body breaks down protein. If you have a kidney problem, too much protein causes too much urea, which can lead to nausea, vomiting, tiredness, headaches, a bad taste in the mouth, bad breath, and problems with memory and concentration.

Ureter: The tube that connects the kidneys to the bladder.

Urethra: The tube that takes urine out of the body from the bladder.

Urine: The name for excess fluid and waste products that are removed from your body by the kidneys. Commonly called wee.

Urine collection: Collecting all your urine for 24 hours and storing it in a special bottle. This urine sample is tested for protein, which helps to determine your kidney function.

Urinalysis: A test to measure the amount of protein, blood and other substances in the urine.

Urology: The study of the urinary system.

V

Vascular access catheter: A special tube which is surgically inserted into your neck, collarbone or top of your leg to allow access for haemodialysis. One channel of the catheter takes blood to the dialysis machine, and the other returns cleaned blood from the dialysis machine. A vascular access catheter is usually temporary until a fistula or graft is ready to be used. Also called a central venous catheter. (See Fistula)

Vein: A blood vessel returning blood to the heart.

Vitamin D: A vitamin that is made in your skin after you have been in the sun. The kidneys change Vitamin D so that your body can use it.

W

Water retention: See Fluid retention

For more information about Kidney or Urinary health, please contact our free call Kidney Health Information Service (KHIS) on 1800 454 363. Alternatively, you may wish to email KHIS@kidney.org.au or visit our website www.kidney.org.au to access free health literature.

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