



Think Kidneys is the NHS campaign to improve the care of people at risk of, or with, acute kidney injury.

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Press release from Think Kidneys on World Kidney Day, 12 March 2015

Lack of knowledge about our kidneys by the public could lead to rise in unnecessary deaths due to acute kidney injury (AKI)

Research by Ipsos MORI on behalf of Think Kidneys reveals a major lack of knowledge about the function and care of human kidneys, the hardest working organs in our body, amongst the public. Kidney health specialists warn that people are more likely to die unnecessarily if they don't 'think kidneys'.

Up to 100,000 deaths a year in the UK are associated with acute kidney injury, a condition caused by undue stress on the kidneys. It is believed that a third of these deaths could be prevented, but this will be hampered by people's lack of awareness of the function of their kidneys and knowing when to ask for medical advice.

Ipsos MORI's research among 2,005 adults aged 15+ in Britain between July 4 and 14 2014 is believed to be the first of its kind and shows that:

- About half the population (49%) are not aware their kidneys produce urine, with younger people less likely to know than older people (39% of 16-24s compared to 54% of over 65s).
- While more people think that their kidneys help remove waste from their bodies (60%), fewer are likely to understand they have a role in managing the body's chemical balance (24%) and processing medicines (12%)
- Nearly one in 10 participants (8%) thought incorrectly the kidneys pumped blood and fluids around the body, while very few (3%) recognised the kidneys' role in maintaining the health of bones
- One in 14 of all participants (7%) said that they did not know what their kidneys do.

Richard Fluck, National Clinical Director for Renal for NHS England, and the national programme director of Think Kidneys, NHS England's acute kidney injury national joint programme with the UK Renal Registry, said. "The research shows us that people, generally speaking, don't appreciate the

importance of their kidneys, the hardest working organs in our bodies. Looking after your kidneys by understanding how they work, what may damage them and how to keep them healthy, will help prevent some of the more serious kidney conditions, such as acute kidney injury, which can be life-threatening, or lead to the need for dialysis or a kidney transplant. We are using World Kidney Day as an opportunity to call for increased understanding of kidney function and health to prevent unnecessary suffering and premature death.”

There are simple things you can do to keep your kidneys healthy

- Not smoking
- Drinking alcohol in moderation
- Exercising regularly
- Have a healthy diet by eating fresh fruit and vegetables
- Eating fish, cutting down on red meat, processed food and soft drinks
- Keeping the weight down
- And if you take regular medication ask your pharmacist how it may affect your kidneys

Advice on keeping your kidneys healthy can be found at [NHS Choices](#).

Ipsos MORI’s research revealed a lack of awareness of acute kidney injury, with just 31% of participants claiming to be aware of the condition, yet when asked what they thought it was, just one in four (27%) of those people selected the correct definition of four potential definitions given.

Older people are more likely to suffer from AKI and the research identifies that they are less likely than younger people to be aware of the condition and also the importance of their kidneys in processing medication that they are taking. 31% of 25-34 year olds were aware of AKI, compared to 26% of those aged 65 or over.

“Older people especially should keep hydrated, take regular exercise where possible and eat a balanced diet. If you’re unwell, you should think about your kidneys and ask your pharmacist or doctor whether you should continue your regime of medication.” added Richard Fluck.

The full findings of the research has been published on the [Think Kidneys website](#)

Editors’ notes and background

For more about the programme visit www.thinkkidneys.nhs.uk

A few facts about acute kidney injury (AKI):

- AKI is a common, serious and harmful illness and it can be a killer

- Up to 100,000 deaths a year are associated with AKI and it is believed that up to a third could be prevented¹
- The cost to the NHS is estimated to be around £500m per year.
- AKI is a global issue and the NHS is the first health system in the world to address it
- AKI is 100 times more deadly than MRSA infection²
- AKI definition - A sudden loss of kidney function often caused by stress on the kidneys, usually other serious illness such as infection or sepsis, coming on within hours or days.

The Think Kidneys programme is supporting early detection of AKI through the rollout of a new system to alert clinicians to the possibility of AKI, which comes with the development of a computer algorithm implemented in all hospital pathology laboratory systems. This will mean clinicians will be able to diagnose AKI earlier and treatment can begin sooner, improving outcomes for patients.

The research was carried out on Capibus, Ipsos MORI's face to face omnibus survey of British adults aged 15+. Interviews were conducted face to face in-home. Of the 2005 participants

- 296 were aged 16-24
- 508 were aged 65+
- 596 claimed to be aware of acute kidney injury

Data were weighted according to age, gender, Government office region, social grade, working status, household tenure and ethnicity to match the profile of the population of adults aged 15+ in Great Britain.

To arrange interviews

If you would like to know more about the programme or arrange an interview with Richard Fluck please contact Annie Taylor by email anniemtaylor331@gmail.com or call 07793 608286.

ENDS

¹ NCEPOD, Adding Insult to Injury 2009

² NICE Guidance CG169 2013