



The Vital Importance of Urinary Health

If you haven't thought much about urinary health you're not alone. Most people don't until urination becomes a painful or serious problem. While other organs, like the heart or brain get a lot more attention, your kidneys are just as critical to your life and health.

Your body is about 60-70% water and everyday the normal process of metabolizing food for nutrients and energy creates waste and generates acids that must be filtered. Your kidneys are responsible for this vital function of removing waste and maintaining a slightly alkaline pH. Without this vital function, your body would be poisoned by its own waste in just a few days.

This isn't the only role the kidneys play, they help regulate blood pressure and produce vitamin D and red blood cells. In traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) they are considered the home of the life essence or jing. According to TCM, a deficiency of jing shortens one's life, making the kidney energy foundational to reducing the effects of aging.

The kidneys are also said to "build the bones," in TCM. That is, they help to keep the structural system strong. This may be due to the fact that kidneys help balance fluid and mineral levels, preserving minerals like calcium, potassium, and magnesium for strong bones and muscles. These alkaline minerals are depleted by an overly acid pH. Thus problems like osteoporosis, arthritis, back pain, and weakness in the legs, knees, and ankles as can be thought of as coming from a deficiency of kidney energy (qi).

So, if you're one of the millions of people suffering from one of the many diseases of the urinary system, such as edema, urinary tract infections, interstitial cystitis, urinary incontinence, kidney stones, prostatitis and so forth, the effects of these problems aren't limited to your internal plumbing. Poor kidney function is affecting your structural system and your overall health and longevity.

In this issue of *Sunshine Sharing* we'll discuss various ailments that afflict the urinary system and how to approach them with natural remedies. We'll also talk about the vital importance of water and pH balance to overall health.

Water, pH, and Health

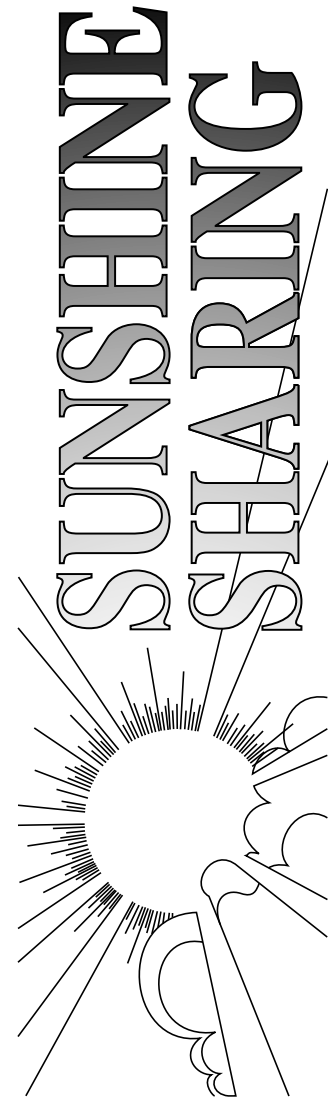
One of the most important things you can do to improve any urinary system problem is to drink more water and help balance your body's pH. So, before skipping ahead to the specific remedies we'll cover later on, make sure you're properly hydrated and alkalized.

As mentioned in the beginning, one of the primary functions of the kidney is to help maintain proper pH levels in the blood and lymph. Acid is generated as the body extracts electrons from food to be used for energy. This acid must be removed from the body to keep the pH slightly alkaline. The primary organs responsible for this are the kidneys, which require a lot of water to dilute and flush the acid from the system.

If the pH starts becoming too acidic due to dehydration, poor kidney function, or other factors, the body starts to borrow alkaline minerals like potassium, magnesium, and



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Your guide to better health the natural way.

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calcium from bones, muscles, and other tissues. The result is a loss of mineral reserves, the tendency to form stones, and a weakening of the structural system.

Most people don't drink enough water. They drink coffee, tea, soda, energy drinks, fruit juice, alcohol, and just about everything except water. However, when it comes to good health, and especially when it comes to the health of the urinary system, nothing takes the place of pure water. Many of the aforementioned beverages are diuretics and soda pop and coffee are quite acid-forming themselves. This means they don't aid kidney function, they stress it.

When you don't drink enough water, the kidneys have to strain harder to eliminate waste. The waste also becomes more concentrated in the urine, which irritates the urinary passages and bladder. This can make a person more susceptible to urinary tract infections, urethritis, cystitis and kidney stones, but it also contributes to stress, constipation, headaches, stiffness and many other health problems.

While being held as a political prisoner in Iran, Dr. F. Batmaghelidj discovered that water alone can help to heal many chronic ailments. Having no medicines to work with, he learned that peptic ulcers could be healed with water alone. Following his release from prison, he continued his research on the healing power of water. In his book, *Your Body's Many Cries for Water*, he claims that the body signals its water shortage by producing pain. He also explains that drinking more water can heal numerous diseases including asthma, arthritis, hypertension, angina, adult-onset diabetes, lupus and multiple sclerosis.

Dr. Batmaghelidj says that thirst is not a reliable indicator of dehydration. His message is, "You are not sick, you are thirsty. Don't treat thirst with medication."

Proper hydration helps the body detoxify, helps clear excess mucus from the lungs and reduces constipation. It increases energy, improves immune function, reduces pain, helps to balance blood sugar, reduce blood pressure, increases mental clarity, reduces anxiety and depression, improves sleep, and even helps with weight loss.

Most people need about two to three quarts of water each day. Furthermore, this should be purified water so that chlorine, fluoride, heavy metals, and other containments have been removed. Purified water tastes better, too, which encourages you to drink more. Adding some alkaline mineral electrolytes—sodium, potassium, and magnesium—will also help to alkalize the system and improve hydration. It also helps to eat less grain, sugar, and animal protein and more fresh fruits and vegetables to alkalize the system and take stress off the kidneys.

So if you're having urinary problems make sure to drink plenty of pure water, avoid acidifying foods and try adding some alkalizing foods to your diet. You'll see how your health improves.

Solving Common Urinary Health Problems

Once you know that you're drinking enough water and helping to keep your body's pH balanced you can start to focus on any specific urinary system problems you might be facing.

Edema

One of the obvious problems that can arise from poor kidney function is water retention, also called edema. The symptoms of edema are fairly obvious—swollen ankles, feet, hands and puffiness under the eyes. If you suffer from chronic edema, first get a medical checkup to determine the cause, as water retention can be a sign of congestive heart failure and other serious diseases.



If the problem is kidney related, herbal diuretics can be used in place of diuretic drugs to help promote better kidney function and reduce edema. As long as the situation isn't life-threatening, using herbal diuretics can be advantageous. Potassium is an important mineral for healthy kidney function, but diuretic drugs tend to deplete potassium levels. Fortunately, many herbal diuretics actually supply potassium and thus help maintain healthy kidney function.

There are two basic kinds of herbal diuretics, those that stimulate the kidney to produce more urine, and those that help to tone the kidneys and improve their function. Stimulant diuretics include juniper berry, buchu, and uva ursi. Tonifying diuretics include dandelion leaf, goldenrod, cleavers, cornsilk, and eucommia bark. Parsley is a mild stimulating diuretic that is also a urinary tonic.

Use stimulating diuretics for acute edema where the kidneys need a little boost. A *Diuretic Formula* where these herbs are the primary ingredients is better than using the remedies as singles. Use tonifying diuretics for long term use or with chronic kidney weakness. The *Chinese Water-Decreasing Formula* is a good tonifying diuretic blend.

Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs)

We think of urine as being unsanitary, but the truth is that urine is sterile, that is, free of bacteria. In order to get a bacterial infection in the urinary system, bacteria have to enter the urethra and travel upwards into the bladder.



Because women have a much shorter urethra they are five times more prone to UTIs than men. In fact, according to the Kidney and Urology Foundation of America, one in five women will have problems with UTIs in her lifetime. Keeping this area clean, and wiping from front to back after using the rest room, can help prevent UTIs.

UTIs usually involve bacteria from the colon such *E. coli* and are typically treated with antibiotics. Unfortunately, frequent use of antibiotics disrupts the friendly bacteria in the colon, which can weaken the immune system and make one more prone to future UTIs. One can also get a UTI from a yeast infection, which antibiotics won't help.

Research shows that cranberries can inhibit bacteria from adhering to urinary passages, which helps prevent bladder infections. So, if you're prone to frequent UTIs, consider drinking unsweetened cranberry juice daily or taking a *UTI Prevention Formula* containing cranberry daily for prevention. Cranberry is not very helpful, however, for getting rid of an active infection in the urinary tract. That requires other remedies.

For active UTIs, uva ursi or any herb containing berberine are good options. Uva ursi contains a substance called arbutin that undergoes a chemical change in the kidneys to form hydroquinone, a chemical that has a powerful disinfectant action on the urinary system. It is most effective when the urine is alkaline. Uva ursi also works better when made into a tea. Use ½ teaspoon or the contents of 3-4 capsules to make a cup of tea and sip it throughout the day for best results.

Berberine containing herbs include goldenseal, Oregon grape, and coptis. You can also get a berberine extract. Berberine is an antibacterial agent, which is excreted via the kidneys, disinfecting the urinary passages. It works well in combination with juniper, uva ursi, and buchu to fight infections.

Urinary Tract Inflammation

There are several inflammatory diseases that take place in the urinary system. Cystitis, also known as interstitial cystitis, is inflammation of the bladder. Urethritis is inflammation of the urethra, the tube that drains the urine from the bladder. This inflammation may be caused by infections or irritants passing through the urinary system. The kidneys can also become inflamed, resulting in nephritis.



When inflammation is present in the urinary system, it can cause burning or scalding pain while urinating. It can also cause back pain and a frequent urge to urinate, which unfortunately prompts many people to drink less water. However, in this case it is important to drink more water to dilute and flush the irritants.

To soothe burning or scalding urination, three of the best remedies are cornsilk, marshmallow and kava kava. Kava kava is especially helpful for painful urination as it is mildly analgesic. Cornsilk and marshmallow soothe the inflammation and burning. Stimulating diuretics like juniper and buchu are not good choices for urinary tract inflammation, but you can use some of the tonifying diuretics, like dandelion and cleavers, too.

Incontinence

When the sphincter muscle at the bottom of the bladder is unable to retain urine, it may leak from the bladder. This

problem is due to a lack of muscle tone in the sphincter muscle. An astringent, such as uva ursi, may be helpful. Again, it works best when it is made into a tea (as described under urinary tract infections) and is sipped throughout the day. Another potentially helpful remedy is the *Chinese Water-Increasing Formula* which contains tonics for the kidneys and bladder like eucommia bark, Sichuan teasel root, and morinda root.



Bed-wetting and Urinating at Night

Young children also have trouble controlling urination because the sphincter muscle is not fully developed. This problem normally resolves itself as they grow older. When adults get stressed or have blood sugar imbalances they may have to wake up several times a night to urinate, but children who tend to sleep deeper will just wet the bed.

Some specific herbs that can help reduce the urge to urinate at night or bed-wetting include astragalus, schizandra, licorice root, and asparagus root. These herbs help the body hold onto moisture. It helps to drink more water during the day and less water in the evening. Try mixing a half teaspoon of a *Liquid Kidney Formula* (containing asparagus root and goldenrod) along with a half teaspoon of a *Liquid Lymph Formula* (containing cleavers and red clover) in a quart of water and sip this during the day to encourage normal urination during daylight hours.

Bed-wetting and frequent waking at night are often signs of excessive stress and adrenal fatigue (also known as burnout). A *Chinese Fire-Increasing Formula* (with schizandra and biota) will help this problem. It can also be a problem with blood sugar, in which case it's best to avoid sugary foods before bedtime in favor of a light protein snack and a little licorice root to stabilize blood sugar levels. Bed-wetting in children can also be due to a deficiency of magnesium.

Kidney Stones

Passing kidney stones can be excruciatingly painful, so it's better to prevent them than to treat them. People in primitive societies rarely develop kidney stones, so why should we? Most kidney stones are formed from calcium oxalate and result from an over concentration of minerals in the urine. Drinking plenty of pure water and not taking excessive doses of calcium will help to keep these minerals in solution.



If you are prone to kidney stones, it may also help to avoid foods that significantly increase urinary oxalate including nuts (especially peanuts), chocolate, and tea. Caffeine and carbonated beverages both increase the risk of forming kidney stones. Magnesium and vitamin B6 are good supplements to take to prevent kidney stones. You can also take a *Diuretic Formula* that contains lithotriptic herbs like hydrangea, gravel root, or

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stone breaker. These herbs help keep calcium from falling out of solution.

If stones have formed you can help them to pass by using hydrangea and lemon water. Mix the juice of four fresh lemons in a gallon of distilled water and drink this while fasting. Take four capsules of hydrangea every two to four hours. Lobelia or kava kava can be used to relax urinary passages and ease pain. Marshmallow and cornsilk can be used to sooth urinary membranes while the stone passes.

Prostatitis and BPH

In males, the prostate sits just under the bladder, surrounding the urethra. Prostatitis is when the prostate becomes inflamed and swells, making urination difficult. The prostate can also enlarge due to over stimulation of estrogens, a condition known as benign prostate hyperplasia (BPH).

Nettle root, pygeum bark, and saw palmetto can all help reduce prostate swelling or help to shrink the prostate. This can improve urinary function in men. Zinc and omega-3 essential fatty acids may also be helpful.

Kidney Weakness/Failure



Progressive kidney failure may not produce any symptoms in the initial stages, but as the kidneys become progressively weaker, they stop being able to regulate water and electrolyte balances, clear waste products from the body, and promote red blood cell production.

This may result in weakness, lethargy, edema, anemia, fatigue, loss of appetite, and shortness of breath. The body becomes increasingly acidic and rising levels of urea in the blood will harm the brain and heart. This can lead to congestive heart

failure, arrhythmia, tachycardia, and fibrillation. As symptoms progress a person may be placed on dialysis and/or be scheduled for a kidney transplant.

Understanding the indications for kidney qi deficiency will help you recognize declining kidney function before the situation becomes dire. Arthritis, osteoporosis, low back pain and weakness in the lower extremities can all be signs of kidney chi deficiency. When these issues are present, try a *Chinese Water-Increasing Formula*. This formula helps the kidneys become more efficient at eliminating waste acids from the system. It can relieve gouty arthritis, help prevent kidney stones, and strengthen the urinary system to prevent chronic UTIs. It may also help frequent urination and urinary incontinence.

Other herbs that can support and improve kidney function where there is kidney weakness, include goldenrod, nettle leaf, parsley, morinda root, and dandelion leaf. To take stress off the kidneys eat a diet with lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, particularly celery, parsley, and other potassium-rich greens. Eliminate soda pop, reduce consumption of animal proteins, and avoid food additives and chemicals.

Actual kidney failure is a serious condition that requires medical treatment. However, nettle seed and the *Chinese Water-Increasing Formula* may be helpful in addition to medical treatment. Charcoal poultices over the kidneys may also be helpful.

Additional Help and Information

For more information about overcoming problems in the urinary system contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

Strategies for Health by Steven Horne

Modern Herbal Dispensatory by Thomas Easley and Steven Horne

You're Not Sick, You're Thirsty Water for Health, for Healing, for Life by F. Batmanghelidj