

Chronic kidney disease impacts 500 million individuals worldwide

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), an estimated 500 million individuals globally suffer from chronic kidney disease and an estimated 5 million South Africans over 20 years of age have chronic kidney disease (CKD).



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Even more startling, an updated 2022 study indicates this figure could be considerably higher with 10% of 800 million individuals affected by CKD.

“CKD is a “silent disease” as most patients are asymptomatic at the onset and early stages of the disease. Targeted screening of people at risk of developing CKD is therefore critical for early detection, prevention or slowing down of progression and timely management of CKD,” says Fikile Tsela, nephrologist at The Urology Hospital Pretoria.

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a progressive loss of kidney function over a period of months or years. Each of your kidneys has about a million tiny filters called nephrons. If nephrons are damaged, they stop working.

For a while, healthy nephrons can take on the extra work. But if the damage continues, more and more nephrons will shut down. After a certain point, the nephrons that are left cannot filter your blood well enough to keep you healthy.

When kidney function falls below a certain level, it’s considered kidney failure and affects your whole body, making you

feel very ill. Untreated kidney failure can be life-threatening.

The role of inherited hypertension

Kidney failure in South African adults is mainly due to inherited hypertension (60-65%) or Type 2 diabetes (another 20-25%), with the black population being four times higher at risk than other groups due to the high incidence of hypertension.

You can lose up to 90% of kidney function before experiencing any symptoms and most people don't have any symptoms until CKD is at an advanced stage.

Signs of advancing CKD include swollen ankles, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, decreased appetite, blood in the urine, and foamy urine.

Chronic kidney disease does not just disappear and can progress to kidney failure.

Blood and urine tests are performed to check for kidney disease, followed by the required treatment. The earlier CKD is detected, the better your chances of receiving effective treatment.

In observance of World Kidney Day, The Urology Hospital hosted free screening on 10 March 2023. The screening criteria were hypertension, diabetes, and family history of kidney disease.

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