

## **A HIDDEN CAUSE OF BACK PAIN**

At least once a week someone comes into my office with symptoms of mid to low back pain located on one side more than the other and states, "I don't know what happened. I just woke up with back pain." In cases like this kidney disease has to be ruled out.

It is generally not too difficult to determine if further kidney testing needs to be done. Back pain with no prior history and no trauma are good indicators that a closer look needs to be taken. Next, if pain is primarily on one side that is another clue that your kidney may be involved. Still, the one test that I find most useful is just poking around. If the back pain is due to muscle, bone, tendon or ligament I can usually reproduce the pain with pressure and motion to the affected area. If the patient can move fine and feels no significant pain with deep palpation I begin to suspect the pain is coming from something deeper than I can readily get my hands on. A common kidney test that comes next is called a "Jar" test. The basic idea is that kidneys do not do well with motion, especially if they are sick. So, the suspected kidney is jarred. I do this by placing one hand over the suspected kidney and gently thumping it with the other hand. If the kidney is in some way damaged this light jarring will most times reproduce the pain.

If the "Jar Test" is positive than it is time to do a more complete kidney work-up. Does this patient have a history of kidney infections or kidney stones? Is there blood in the urine or some other discoloration of the urine? Is the back pain accompanied by nausea or vomiting? Is there pain with urination? Temperature must then be checked. If a fever is present than it is likely that the kidney problem is an infection. If there is no fever most times this is a kidney stone.

If the likely cause is a kidney infection then a trip to the medical doctor for a urinalysis and antibiotics is necessary. Kidney infections left unchecked can permanently damage the kidney. The urinalysis will give the doctor information as to the severity of the infection and the amount of damage done to the kidney.

If the likely cause is a kidney stone then you will likely leave my office with a script to get a C.T. scan on your kidneys to visualize the stone. Once the stone, or for those less fortunate, stones are seen the doctor can make a determination as to whether it will pass given time and some pain medication or if they will need to do a surgical procedure to remove the stone. Most stones are passed without the need for surgical intervention. If the stone is too large to pass most times it is broken to smaller pieces with a procedure called Lithotripsy. Then the smaller pieces are allowed to pass. Rarely is an open surgical procedure necessary.

Some people are just more prone to kidney stones and infections. If this is you, there are some preventative measures that are worth your time. First, drink lots of water. This means between a half and a full gallon of water a day to keep the kidneys flushed out. Second, stay away caffeinated drinks. Third, if you suspect a bladder or urinary tract infection take care of it right away. If you wait it can travel up the ureter to the kidney. Some evidence exists that a lower protein diet may help decrease the incidence of kidney stones. Strangely, though kidney stones are often made largely of calcium, a higher

calcium diet seems better than a low calcium diet for preventing stones. Lastly, some fruit juices, cranberry, orange and black currant, are helpful to prevent stones and quell an infection.

Remember, that if you have back pain and think it will just go away, it may be your body trying to tell you there is a deeper problem. Any pain that comes on without obvious reason should be investigated by your chiropractor or medical doctor to ensure there is not a hidden cause.