

# What does the kidneys do and why is it important to look after your kidneys?

*To have a healthy body, you will need healthy kidneys.*

Did you know that kidneys have a number of responsibilities? They are responsible for removing waste products, toxins and excess water in the body. They help to regulate the blood pressure and activate Vitamin D to help the bones and muscles to remain in a good shape.

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the kidney as one of the five key organs in the body. The kidney plays a part in bone growth, development, reproduction and aging. It helps to maintain our body systems. Our body systems rely on the kidneys to circulate Qi and energy around the body in order for them to function properly. If there are imbalances in the kidneys, this will affect other body functions and lead to health-related issues to occur.

## **What is Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)?**

Chronic Kidney Disease occurs when the kidneys are not working properly. It is often caused by high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, kidney infection, kidney inflammation, blockage in the flow of urine, intake of certain medicines (such as lithium and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)). Some signs of CKD include swollen ankles, feet or arms, shortness of breath, tiredness, feeling sick and blood in the urine. Blood and urine test are used to diagnose CKD. The test results will show how severity of the kidneys are damaged, as well as what stage is the kidney disease. CKD affects three million people in the United Kingdom (UK). The

average waiting time for a kidney transplant is three years. Currently, there is no cure for CKD. Patients with CKD are treated depending on the severity of the kidney disease. Treatments may include taking medicines for associated problems (such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol), dialysis (a treatment to replicate some of the kidney functions in severe cases) and kidney transplant.

### **How TCM treatments can help to treat CKD and related symptoms?**

The National Institute of Health (NIH) have found that acupuncture can help to treat CKD. Acupuncture can help to improve renal function, reduces proteinuria (protein in urine), controls hypertension (high blood pressure), relieves pain, insomnia and fatigue. Other research has suggested that warm needle acupuncture (acupuncture and moxibustion combined) can help to enhance immunity and improve blood circulation. Other TCM treatments, such as acupressure can help to treat certain CKD related symptoms. These include relief for fatigue, depression and sleep disturbances.

### **What can I do to look after my kidneys?**

There are many ways to look after your kidneys. Here are some ways to keep your kidneys healthy: maintain a healthy weight, eat no more than six grams of salt a day, aim to do around thirty minutes of exercise (five days a week), stop smoking, keep your body hydrated, drink less alcohol and take drugs like ibuprofen with caution.

For more information, please contact us on:

Address: 50 Bridge Street, Manchester, M3 3BW. Phone: 0161 711 0456

E-mail: [info@acuspa.co.uk](mailto:info@acuspa.co.uk)

Website: <http://www.acuspa.co.uk/>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/acuspamcr/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AcuSpa.UK>

Twitter: [https://twitter.com/acuspa\\_uk](https://twitter.com/acuspa_uk)

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