5 Subtle Signs Your Kidneys May Be Failing (Most People Miss These) Transcript

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Introduction to Kidney Health and Swelling

Your kidneys are master regulators of fluid balance. They decide how much water and sodium to keep and how much to release. When kidney function declines, this regulation gets thrown off.

Fluid starts accumulating in tissues where it doesn't belong. Now, swelling can have many causes. Heart issues, liver problems, even just standing too long.

But if you're noticing persistent unexplained swelling, especially combined with other signs on this list, your kidneys deserve attention. I'm Dr. Vismair Phan, a physician on a mission to help you break free from symptom management and step into a life of thriving health.

Together, we will uncover simple, powerful ways to prevent disease, restore energy, and take control of your health naturally. If you're ready to stop managing illness and start building vitality, you are in the right place.

Your prescription for vitality starts now.

Five Early Warning Signs of Kidney Trouble

Here's something that keeps me up at night. You can lose up to 70% of your kidney function before you feel obviously sick. 70%. That means by the time most people realize something's wrong, they have already lost the majority of their kidney capacity.

But here's what I've discovered after years of practice. The signs are there. They are just subtle. They're easy to dismiss. They are the kind of things you mention to your doctor and get told, that's probably nothing.

Today I want to walk you through five warning signs that your kidneys might be struggling. Signs that most people overlook. Signs that I wish more of my patients had caught earlier.

Because when it comes to kidney health, early detection isn't just helpful, it changes everything. Let's start with something you see every day, but probably don't think much about.

Your urine. Healthy urine should be relatively clear, maybe slightly yellow, depending on hydration.

Foamy Urine and Protein Leakage

What it shouldn't be is foamy. And I don't mean a few bubbles that disappear quickly. I mean persistent foam that looks like the head of a beer. Foam that sticks around.

What's happening here? Your kidneys contain millions of tiny filters called nephrons. When those filters are healthy, they keep protein in your blood where it belongs.

But when the filters are damaged or stressed, protein starts slipping through into your urine. And that protein creates foam. This is called protein urea.

And here's what most people don't realize. It's not just a sign of damage. It actually accelerates damage. The protein itself irritates kidney tissue, creating more inflammation which damages more filters which leaks more protein.

It becomes a cycle. If you're seeing persistent foam, don't miss it. Get it checked. A simple unit test can tell you if protein is leaking through. The second sign is swelling.

Particularly in your ankles, feet, hands, face.

Unexplained Swelling and Fluid Retention

Pay special attention if you wake up with puffy eyes or a swollen face. That improves as the day goes on. Your kidneys are master regulators of fluid balance.

They decide how much water and sodium to keep and how much to release. When kidney function declines, this regulation gets thrown off. Fluid starts accumulating in tissues where it doesn't belong.

Now, swelling can have many causes. Heart issues, liver problems, even just standing too long. But if you're noticing persistent, unexplained swelling, especially combined with other signs on this list, your kidneys deserve attention.

One thing I've noticed in my practice, people often attribute swelling to getting older or eating too much salt last night. And sometimes that's true.

But sometimes it's the first visible sign that kidneys are struggling. Don't normalize it without investigation. This third sign is one of the most common, and most commonly dismissed, fatigue.

Not just tiredness after a long day, but a bone-deep exhaustion that doesn't improve no matter how much you sleep.

Fatigue, Anemia, and Low Oxygen Delivery

Here's the connection. Most people don't know about your kidneys can produce a hormone called erythropoietin, which is EPO for short. This hormone signals your bone marrow to make red blood cells.

And red blood cells are the ones that carry oxygen to your tissue in your body. When kidney function declines, fewer red blood cells get made. Less oxygen reaches your tissue.

The result? You feel exhausted. Your muscles feel heavy. Your brain feels foggy. And no amount of sleep fixes it. Because the problem isn't rest, it's oxygen delivery.

This is actually one of the reasons kidney disease is often caught late. People go to their doctor complaining of fatigue and they get checked for thyroid issues, anemia in a general sense, depression, maybe sleep disorders.

The kidneys often aren't on the radar until other signs appear. So if you've been experiencing unexplained fatigue, especially combined with other symptoms, ask your doctor to check your kidney function and specifically your hemoglobin and red blood cell counts.

The fourth warning sign involves changes in how, when and what you urinate. This might seem obvious. Kidneys make urine, so problems should show up there, right?

But the changes can be subtle. What should you wash for? Frequency changes, especially needing to urinate more often at night.

Changes in Urination Patterns

This is called nocturia. Healthy kidneys concentrate urine at night so you can't sleep through. When kidney function declines, this concentration ability weakens and you are up multiple times.

Color changes. Urine that's consistently darker than usual or paler than usual or has a reddish or a tea-colored tinge that could indicate blood. volume changes, that means producing more or less urine than you used to.

I worked with someone in their 50s who came to me primarily because she was getting up four or five times in the night to urinate. She'd seen a urologist, been told her bladder was fine.

It wasn't until we ran comprehensive kidney labs that we found her GFR had dropped to 45, her kidneys had been declining silently, and nocturia was the signal.

Your urination patterns are data. Pay attention to them. The fifth sign is one that surprises most people. Itching. Persistent, unexplained itching that doesn't respond to lotions or creams.

When your kidneys can't filter waste properly, toxins build up in your blood. This condition is called uremia. and one of the ways uremia manifests in you is through your skin.

The toxins essentially try to exit through your largest organ, causing irritation and itching. This itching tends to be generalized not in one spot, but all over.

It's often worse at night and it's maddening because nothing seems to help.

Persistent Itching and Uremia

By the time itching appears, kidney function is usually significantly impaired. But I mention it because many people experience this for months before connecting it to their kidneys.

They try every lotion, every antihistamine, every dermatologist, the kidneys aren't considered. If you're experiencing persistent, unexplained itching, especially if you have any other risk factors for kidney disease, get your kidneys checked.

So let's bring this together. Five warning signs, foamy urine, unexplained swelling, fatigue that sleep doesn't fix, changes in urination patterns and persistent itching.

Here's what I want you to take away from this. First, your body is always communicating. These signs aren't random. They're signals. The question is whether we are paying attention.

Second, early detection genuinely changes outcomes. When we catch kidney decline early, we have so many more options.

Key Takeaways and When to Get Tested

We can investigate root causes. We can make interventions that actually slow or stop progression. We can avoid the cascade that leads to dialysis. Third, and this is crucial, don't wait for your doctor to suggest kidney testing.

If you are experiencing any of these signs, especially if you have risk factors like diabetes, high blood pressure, family history, advocate for yourself.

Ask for a comprehensive kidney panel. Ask about your GFR, your creatinine, your protein in the urine. Your kidneys are remarkable organs. because they filter 200 quarts of blood every single day.

They deserve your attention before they're in crisis. If you're concerned about any of these signs and want a comprehensive assessment that goes beyond standard labs, we offer consultation at Kidney Institute.

You can visit DrBismar.com. I'll see you there. Thanks for tuning into the Wellness Focus with Dr. Bisma, where we are rewriting the rules of health and giving you the tools to thrive.

Closing Remarks and Resources

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See you next time.