**Hydration Fixation**

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Hydration, hydration, hydration - remember when people simply just said, "drink plenty of water?"

Whatever name you give to it, there is good reason for the advice, especially here in the desert Southwest. If you draw a line along the Southern states, this area is often referred to in the medical profession as the ‘Stone Belt’ because of the hot climates where dehydration is common.

Of course, there are many reasons for kidney stones beyond dehydration. If you've had kidney stones, you know what they are and how they feel. If you haven't been diagnosed before, there are signs to watch out for. But for the (fortunately) uninitiated . . .

**What are kidney stones (besides painful)?**

Kidney stones are small, hard deposits that form inside your kidneys. The stones are made of mineral and acid salts. They can have many causes and can affect any part of your urinary tract from your kidneys to your bladder.

Passing stones can be very painful, but they usually cause no permanent damage. In some instances, however, stones can become lodged in the urinary tract or cause other complications and require surgery.

**Signs of a problem**

You may not experience any symptoms until a stone moves around within your kidney or passes into your ureter (the tube connecting the kidney and bladder). If that happens, you may experience one or more of the following signs and symptoms:

* A persistent need to urinate
* Cloudy or foul-smelling urine
* Fever and chills (if an infection is present)
* Nausea and vomiting
* Pain when urinating
* Severe pain in your sides and back, below the ribs
* Pain that spreads to your lower abdomen and groin
* Pain that comes in waves and fluctuates in intensity
* Pink, red or brown urine
* Urinating more often than usual
* Urinating small amounts of urine

You should seek immediate medical attention if you experience:

* Blood in your urine
* Difficulty passing urine
* Pain so severe that you can't sit still or find a comfortable position
* Pain accompanied by nausea and vomiting
* Pain accompanied by fever and chills

**But why?**

Kidney stones often have no definite, single cause, although there are several factors that can increase your risk:

**Dehydration.** Not drinking enough water each day can increase your risk of kidney stones and people who live in warm climates (like here in Southern Nevada) and those who sweat a lot (e.g., manual labor, especially outdoors) may be at higher risk.

**Diet.** A diet high in protein, sodium and sugar may increase your risk of some types of kidney stones.

**Digestive diseases and surgery.** Chronic diarrhea, inflammatory bowel disease or gastric bypass surgery can cause changes in digestion that increase the levels of stone-forming substances in your urine.

**Family or personal history.** If someone in your family has kidney stones, you're more likely to develop stones. And if you've already had one or more kidney stones, you're at increased risk of developing them again.

**Obesity.** A high body mass index (BMI), large waist size and weight gain have been linked to an increased risk of kidney stones.

Your family doctor can usually treat small kidney stones that don’t block your kidney or cause other problems. But if you have a large kidney stone and experience severe pain or kidney problems, your doctor may refer you to a urologist - a doctor who treats problems in the urinary tract.