



Immunoglobulin A Nephropathy FAQ

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What is Immunoglobulin A Nephropathy (IgAN) ?

IgAN is a disease of the filters of the kidney (glomeruli). Diseases of the filters of the kidney are called glomerulonephritis. IgAN has its name because of the pattern that the doctor sees when looking at the kidney biopsy under the microscope.

In IgAN, the filters of both kidneys become blocked up and inflamed. Under the microscope the kidney filter are clogged up by a protein called IgA.

What causes IgAN?

The protein IgA is normally a healthy part of the immune system, helping defend the body against infections. For unknown reasons the immune system produces too much sticky IgA, and the IgA injures the kidney filters.

More rarely IgAN can develop in people as a response to bowel or liver disease, or viral infections. Your doctor may test you for these conditions.

What are the symptoms and signs of IgAN?

Most of the time, IgAN is silent so blood and urine tests are critical to detect IgAN.

“Hematuria” means blood in the urine. It can be invisible or turn the urine red in colour.

“Proteinuria” refers to protein spilling in the urine and it is found by testing the urine.

“Hypertension” means high blood pressure. It has no symptoms unless dangerously high. It is common in IgAN.

“Creatinine” is a blood test used to estimate how well the kidneys are cleaning. Lower values mean the better the healthier kidneys.



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What are the treatment options?

These fall into two categories:

1 – Treatments that do not affect the immune system: These include medicines to control blood pressure, manage swelling, and lower cholesterol. Stopping smoking and healthy lifestyle choices also protect kidneys. Some research supports the use of fish oil supplements. Often these treatments are enough to keep kidneys healthy.

2 – Immune system lowering treatment: These medicines lower the body's immune system so that it does not make excess IgA. These medicines can have more side effects and need to be carefully dosed and monitored.

How about my diet?

Your diet did not cause your kidney disease and changes in the diet have not been shown to cure IgAN. However, some changes in diet (ex. Lowering salt) can help with blood pressure and cholesterol. Ask your doctor!

What can happen to people with IgAN?

Sometimes IgAN can permanently scar the kidneys and cause the kidneys to work less effectively (chronic kidney disease) or stop cleaning the blood (kidney failure). It is important to follow the condition with regular blood and urine tests.

Hope for the future

It is important to stay positive. Your doctors will work closely with you to keep you healthy and protect your kidneys! There are large networks of doctors and researchers studying IgAN and testing new treatments. Participation in a research study is always optional but can be a rewarding experience. Ask your doctor about opportunities to participate in helping to find a cure!