Alternative Treatments for Kidney Stones

The National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse reports that kidney stones are one of the most common disorders of the urinary tract. Kidney stones--medically known as nephrolithiasis--are small, hard deposits of mineral and acid salts in the upper urinary tract that may cause intense flank pain, nausea, vomiting, chills, fever and infection. Many stones pass through the body without a need for surgical intervention. Natural and alternative treatments for kidney stones are aimed at supporting healthy urinary tract function and preventing stone formation. If stones are present, it's helpful to know the stone type, so consult a physician for proper diagnosis and guidance on a personalized treatment plan.

Diet

Dr. Michael Murray and Dr. Peter Bongiorno, naturopathic physicians and contributors to the "Textbook of Natural Medicine", note that kidney stone incidence has steadily grown along with other diseases associated with the Western diet, high in refined carbohydrates and low in nutrients. Diet has a direct effect on urine composition and pH, which play a role in stone formation and prevention. For calcium oxalate stones, a low-oxalate diet may reduce oxalic acid excretion and therefore prevent stone formation. High-oxalate foods to avoid include beets, spinach, tomato, rhubarb, buckwheat and sesame seeds. Additionally, consider consuming plenty of fiber, and, as dehydration contributes to kidney stone formation, drink plenty of water on a regular basis.

Nutritional Supplementation

Murray and Bongiorno state that the following nutrients may be helpful in treating and preventing kidney stones: magnesium, vitamin B6, glutamic acid, calcium, citrate and vitamin K. These nutrients work by increasing stone solubility or preventing excretion of stone-forming compounds. Also, studies in the Federation of European Microbiological Societies' "Microbiology Letters" and in "Urological Research" suggest that probiotic supplementation may be helpful in preventing calcium stone formation. Note that the effects of nutrients vary by the stone type and the individual, so consult with a nutritionally-trained physician, such as a licensed naturopathic doctor, for appropriately individualized nutritional advice.

Botanical Medicine

Murray and Bongiorno list several botanicals that may be helpful in treating and preventing nephrolithiasis. They work by inhibiting the growth rate of stones, preventing stone formation, reducing stone size or relaxing ureter spasm during stone passage. These herbs include common madder, yellow dock, aloe, partridge berry, rue and hydrangea. As always, seek the advice of a botanical medicine expert for appropriate herbal combinations and dosing.

Lifestyle

Weight control and insulin insensitivity are risk factors for kidney stone formation. Therefore, to prevent kidney stones, lose excess weight and maintain a balanced blood sugar. Also, because stress is associated with kidney stone formation, engage regularly in stress-management techniques.

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References

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