

Nephritis

Nephritis is a term used to describe a number of similar conditions, all of which have one thing in common – they result in inflammation of the kidneys.

Nephritis is a serious problem. Even the mild forms can become more aggressive in some circumstances, or can cause high blood pressure many years down the track.

Although there are many different types of nephritis, most cause very few (if any) symptoms. Most people with nephritis feel perfectly well. Sometimes there may be unusual tiredness or lack of energy, swelling of the ankles or shortness of breath. Lack of symptoms is the reason why it is so hard for people with nephritis to realise that there is a problem at all.

Most people with nephritis will have at least one of the following problems, which are discovered by medical tests (such as blood, urine or blood pressure tests):

- Blood in the urine (haematuria)
- Protein in the urine (proteinuria)
- Raised blood pressure (hypertension)
- Reduced kidney function (renal impairment)

Unfortunately, nephritis may not be discovered until significant damage has resulted to the kidneys.

Most types of nephritis are caused by the body's own immune system attacking and damaging the kidney tissue, reducing its function and effectiveness.

Nephritis is also the most common cause of kidney failure in Australia.

There are about twelve major types of nephritis, and a large number of less common conditions. The many types of nephritis behave and are treated differently. Only by knowing the exact type of nephritis can a doctor determine the best course of treatment. Most forms of nephritis are minor and require no treatment. These rarely lead to long-term kidney damage and can largely be ignored. For some of the more severe forms of nephritis, immunosuppressive drugs are used.

Whatever type of nephritis you have, even if it is mild, some form of follow-up will be required to ensure that kidney function and blood pressure can be monitored.