NATIONAL KIDNEY FOUNDATION®

YOUR NEPHROLOGY REFERRAL AND IgAN: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

What is IgA Nephropathy?

IgA nephropathy (IgAN) is a kidney disease. It happens when a protein made by your immune system, called **IgA,** builds up in the kidneys. This can cause damage to the tiny filters in the kidneys, called **glomeruli.** When these filters are damaged, your kidneys may have trouble removing waste and extra fluid from your blood. IgA nephropathy is also called Berger's disease.

What is a Nephrologist?

A nephrologist is a medical doctor who specializes in kidney care and kidney diseases.

Why Did I Get a Nephrology Referral?

Your primary care clinician recommended that you see a kidney specialist to check your kidney health. This may be because of symptoms, signs, or lab results that suggest a kidney problem.

IgAN may be suspected because of certain symptoms or test results. Your referral may be related to one or more of the signs below. This is not a complete list. These signs can also happen with other health problems, so seeing a nephrologist can help find out what is going on and confirm a diagnosis.

- **Protein in the urine (proteinuria):** Too much protein in the urine can be a sign of kidney damage. It may make your urine look foamy. A urine test can also find protein, even if you do not notice any changes.
- **Blood in the urine (hematuria):** Blood in the urine can be caused by IgAN, an infection, or other health problems. Sometimes blood changes the urine color to pink, red, or brown. In early IgAN, the blood is often too small to see and is found only with a urine test.
- **Swelling (edema):** Swelling can happen in the hands, feet, ankles, or around the eyes. This may happen when the body holds on to extra fluid.
- **High blood pressure (hypertension):** Lower kidney function can cause extra fluid to build up in the body. This can raise blood pressure. High blood pressure can also damage the kidneys, blood vessels, and heart.

How to Prepare for Your Appointment

Preparing for a medical appointment can help you get the most out of your time with the healthcare team. You can bring these items for your visit. You can also contact the medical office ahead of time to find out what else you may need.

- **Photo ID and Insurance Card:** Usually required for check-in.
- **Referral paperwork:** If required by your health plan.
- **Medication list:** Bring a list of all medicines you take. Include prescriptions, over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, and supplements.
- **Medical records:** Bring any recent lab results, reports, or notes from other clinicians that relate to your kidneys or overall health.
- **Symptoms or concerns:** Write down anything you have noticed, such as foamy urine, swelling, tiredness, or changes in how often you urinate.
- **Questions:** Write down any concerns you have about your diagnosis, symptoms, or treatment options.

You can also ask a family member or friend to come with you if you would like support.

Questions You May Want to Ask

- What do my kidney numbers mean?
- What may be causing my kidney problem? Is it IgAN?
- When should I follow up to have my labs rechecked?
- What blood pressure goal is right for me?
- Are any of my medicines unsafe for my kidneys, or do any doses need to be changed?
- What lifestyle changes do you suggest I make? Should I change what I eat or drink?
- What symptoms should I watch for? What should I do if I notice these symptoms?

What to Expect at Your Visit

- **Review:** The nephrologist will review your health history, medicines, lifestyle, and recent lab results.
- **Exam:** A physical exam can include checking your blood pressure, heart, lungs, and areas for swelling.
- **Discussion:** The nephrologist will explain what your results may mean and answer your questions.
- **More tests:** Your nephrologist may order more tests. This may include a procedure known as a kidney biopsy, in which a tiny piece (sample) of your kidney is removed and then looked at with a microscope. A kidney biopsy definitively confirms an IgAN diagnosis.
- **Care Plan:** Your nephrologist may discuss a care plan with you. This plan may include follow-up visits, lifestyle changes, changes to what you eat or drink, or medicines.

Appointment Details

Nephrology Office/Clinic: _____

Date and Time of Appointment: _____

Location: _____

Phone: _____

Notes

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For more information, contact the National Kidney Foundation

Toll-free help line: 855.NKF.CARES or email: nkfcares@kidney.org

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