NATIONAL KIDNEY FOUNDATION®

IgAN FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is IgAN?

- Immunoglobulin A Nephropathy, also called IgA nephropathy or IgAN, is a kidney disease where antibodies build up in your kidneys and cause damage to your glomeruli (small filters inside your kidneys). Antibodies are proteins made by your immune system to protect against germs like bacteria and viruses.
- IgA is the specific type of antibody involved, with the full name being immunoglobulin A.
- Nephropathy is a word to describe damage to the glomeruli (small filters inside your kidneys).

2. What are the signs and symptoms of IgAN?

- Many people with IgAN may not have any symptoms at first. As the disease gets worse, symptoms usually appear. If symptoms are present, you may notice one or more of the following:
  - Foamy urine
  - Puffiness around the eyes (especially in the morning)
  - Swelling of your legs, feet, ankles, belly area, or face
  - Hematuria (blood in your urine), especially if it starts during or soon after a cold, sore throat, or respiratory infection (an infection in your sinus, throat, airways, or lungs).
    For many people with early stages of IgAN, the blood in the urine is not possible to see without a microscope. So, it is usually found during a urinalysis or similar test.
  - Change in the color of urine – either pink, dark brown, or cola-colored urine
  - High blood pressure

3. What causes IgAN?

- The exact causes of IgAN are not well understood. Research suggests it may be caused by a mix of your genes and environment. For most people, the disease usually starts with a cold, sore throat, or respiratory infection.
- As your immune system fights the infection, some people make very high levels of IgA antibodies. When you have too many of these antibodies in your blood, they can get stuck in your glomeruli (small filters in your kidneys). When they get stuck, it causes inflammation, scarring, and kidney damage.

4. What are the risk factors for developing IgAN?

- Although anyone can develop IgAN, it is usually more common in people who:
  - Have a family history of IgAN or IgA vasculitis
  - Have celiac disease (gluten allergy), inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), hepatitis, cirrhosis (liver failure), or HIV (human immunodeficiency virus)
  - Are between the ages of 10 and 40 years old
  - Are male
  - Are of Asian, Pacific Island, or White European ancestry



Foamy or pink/ brown-colored urine



Swelling around the eyes, face, belly, legs, feet, or ankles



High blood pressure

5. What are the complications of IgAN?

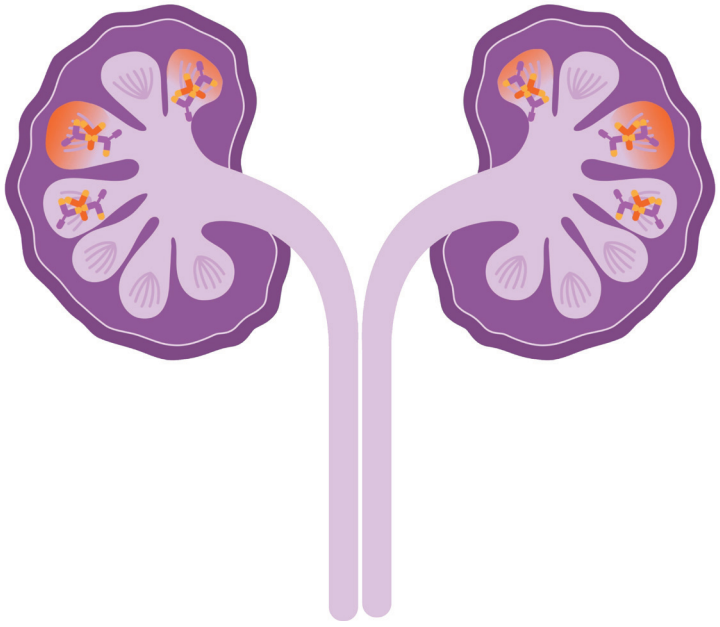
- Healthy kidneys keep blood cells and albumin (protein) from getting into the urine. So, one of the earliest signs of kidney damage from IgAN is blood and/or protein (albumin) leaking into your urine. Without treatment, this can get worse over time and lead to complications.
- Complications of IgAN can include:
  - High blood pressure: Your kidneys also play a role in balancing your blood pressure. When they are damaged by IgAN, it gets harder for your kidneys to continue maintaining this balance.
  - Heart disease: High amounts of protein in your urine increase your risk for heart failure, heart attack, and/or stroke.
  - Chronic kidney disease (CKD): Over time, the IgAN can cause the slow loss of your kidney function. Your risk is even higher if you also have other risk factors for CKD like diabetes or high blood pressure.
  - Kidney failure: When your kidneys don't work well enough to support your body's needs.

6. How is IgAN diagnosed?

- Lab tests are used to get the complete picture of your kidney health and see if you may have IgAN. If lab tests and symptoms suggest IgAN, a kidney biopsy would be done to confirm a diagnosis.
- A biopsy is a procedure where a tiny tissue sample is examined under a microscope to look for signs of IgAN.

7. How is IgAN treated?

- There is no cure for IgAN. So, treatment is focused on managing your symptoms and blood pressure and slowing the kidney disease process.
- Newer medicines that directly target the IgAN disease process are also available. Lifestyle changes can include a heart-healthy, low-sodium diet, and exercising safely as advised by your healthcare team.



For more information, contact the National Kidney Foundation

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

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