

Drink to lower risk of kidney stones

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If you do not drink enough water, you are at risk of getting stones in the kidneys, bladder and gall bladder, writes **Nadia Badarudin**

YOU have been working several hours since morning. You are thirsty and your lips are dry but you are too lazy to walk to the pantry for a glass of water.

Sometimes you refuse to drink because you do not want to go to the

urinary tract and be flushed out of the body. However, some get stuck in the ureter and block urine flow.

"This is when the problem starts. Some stones are so big they can only be removed surgically," he says.

SEVERE PAIN

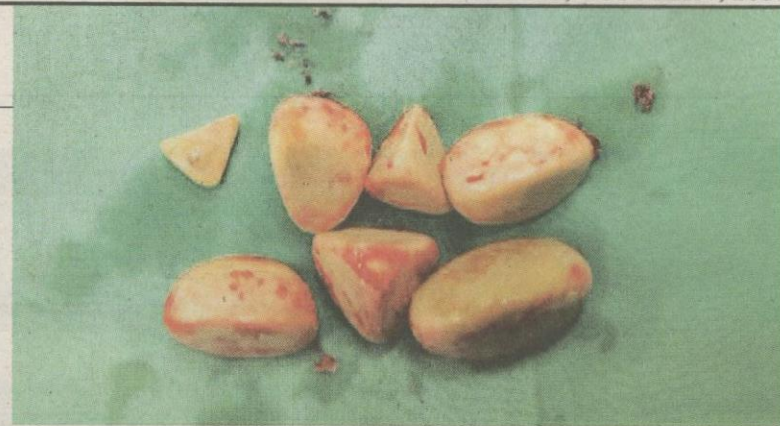
Dr Balan says kidney stones can cause severe pain. Some patients describe it "as bad as labour pain".

The pain is sudden and intense. Patients will experience a dull aching pain from the back, which moves toward the groin. Dr Balan says the pain is unlike a urinary tract infection where patients experience a severe burning sensation while urinating and which can be eased with painkillers.

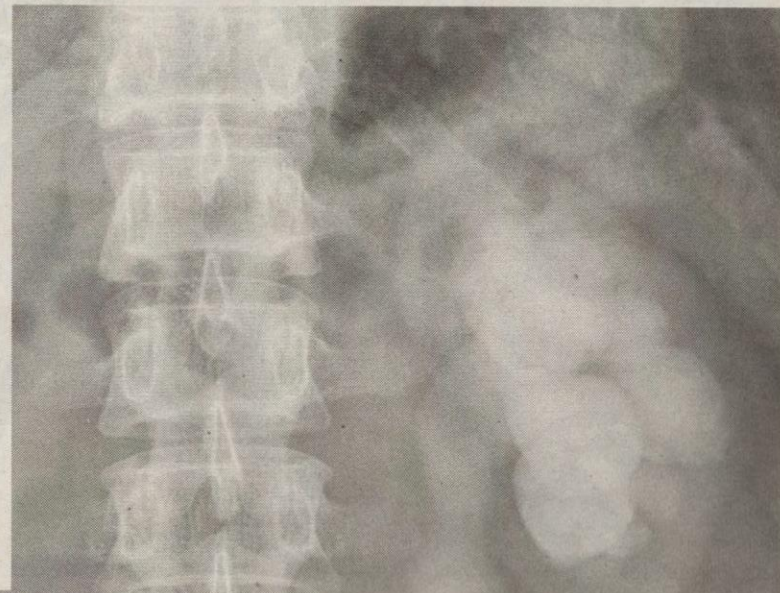
"Some patients say the pain is like somebody breaking your bone. Some



*Kidney stones can be avoided simply by **drinking lots of water.***



Kidney stones in various sizes.



toilet frequently. This is a common scenario. We all know the importance of drinking plenty of water to maintain our health but we choose to ignore it.

Not drinking enough water means you are simply asking for trouble.

Your body will be prone to numerous health problems, including stones in kidneys, bladder or gall bladder which can cause excruciating pain.

UROLITHIASIS

Pantai Hospital Kuala Lumpur consultant urologist Dr S. Ambikai Balan says a kidney stone is a solid mass formed from dietary minerals in the urine.

"The stones are identified based on their locations in the body. For instance, stones formed in the kidney are called kidney stones, while bladder stones are those found in the bladder. Ureteral stones are those which originate in the kidney and get stuck in the ureter."

He says the types of stones can be ascertained from their mineral compounds. The common types are calcium-oxalate (most common), struvite, uric acid and cystine.

Dr Balan says stone formation is related to decreased urine volume which happens because of insufficient water consumption.

"The stone is formed in a process called urolithiasis that makes the urine become supersaturated. Urine will become crystallised, and eventually stones are formed," he says.

Small stones can move down the

have even confused it with a heart attack. There are also patients who collapse because of the unbearable pain," he says.

"Sometimes, the stones are big but do not cause any pain. They can be detected during a routine health screening or if blood is found in the urine."

AT RISK

People who do not drink enough fluids (less than 1,200ml a day) and who are constantly in a hot environment are at risk of having kidney stones.

"People living within a specific climate and geographic location (with similar dietary habits) are prone to the disease. Other factors are family history of stone disease, a

diet high in salt, calcium and animal protein, infection in the urinary system and chronic obstruction to urinary flow," says Dr Balan, adding that patients with uncontrolled diabetes are also susceptible.

He says men are more likely to get stones than women. "Female hormones may help prevent the formation of calcium-oxalate stones by keeping urine alkaline and by raising protective citrate levels," he says.

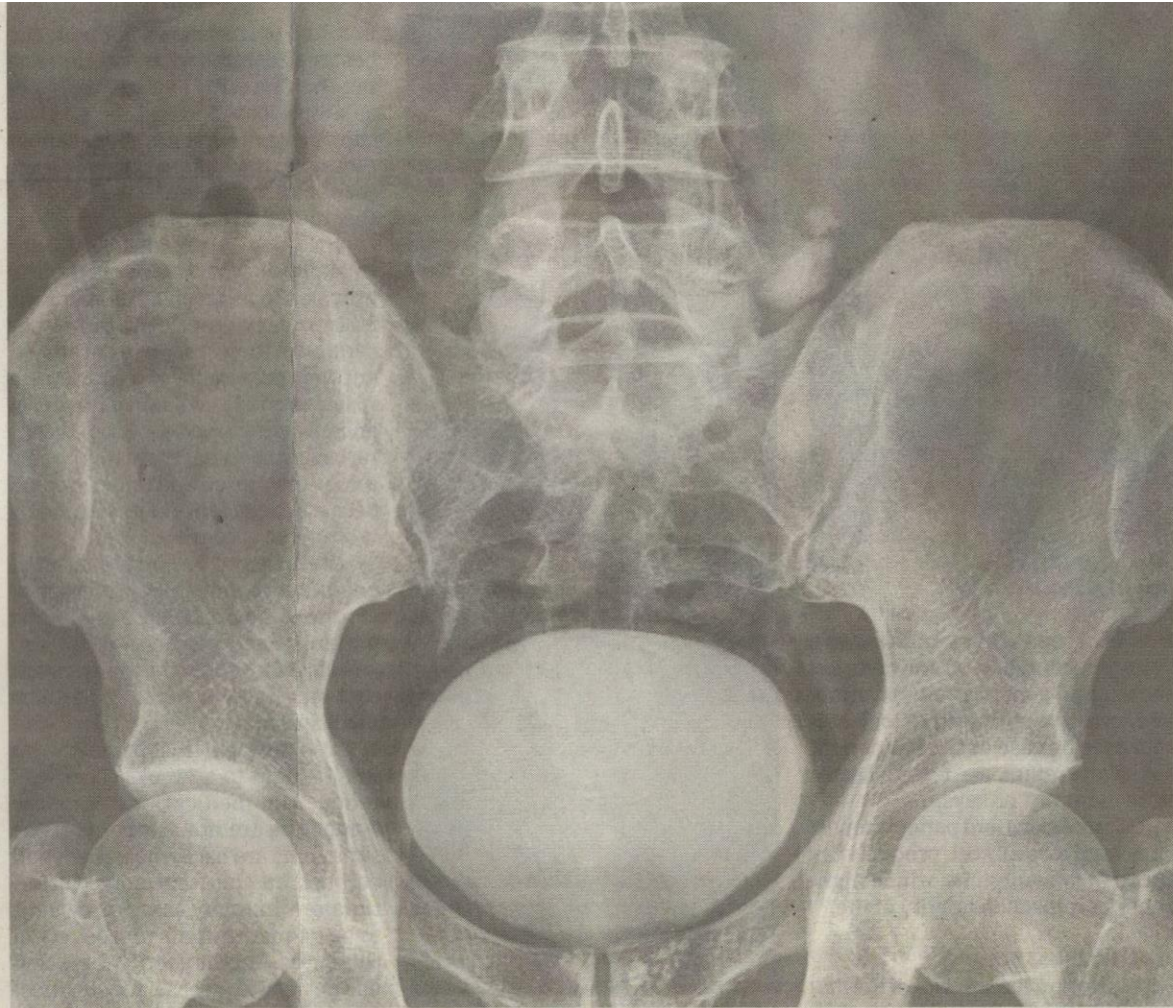
"Recurrence rates are high. Patients have a 10 per cent chance of getting the condition again if they do not change their diet and lifestyles."

Can it be fatal?

Kidney stones per se do not cause death, but the consequences of having stones might have severe



Pantai Hospital Kuala Lumpur consultant urologist **Dr S. Ambikai Balan** says kidney stones result from the lack of water consumption and an unhealthy diet.



A big stone in the pelvis.

PICTURES COURTESY OF DR S. AMBIKAI BALAN

impact on health.

Dr Balan explains: "Stones can cause infection due to the obstruction. This can cause severe sepsis (urosepsis) in the elderly or individuals with an impaired immune system. This is life-threatening. The renal function can deteriorate due to the obstruction, leading to renal failure in the long run."

TREATMENTS

Treatment options vary, based on the size of stone, its location and

whether it causes an obstruction. The general condition of the patient also plays a big role when considering treatment options.

Dr Balan says while acute cases with obstruction require surgery, most kidney stones are managed conservatively. The patient is advised to drink plenty of liquids. Fresh, citrus drinks sometimes help dissolve certain types of stones.

However, prevention is always better than cure.

Dr Balan advises: "Drink water

regularly and maintain a healthy diet to avoid kidney stones. If you think you are at risk of developing urinary tract stones, it is best to talk to your doctor. If you have suffered with stones previously, it is important to have some radiological follow-up to monitor the condition.

"Besides pain, one has to be mindful of other symptoms such as fever, chills, or loss of appetite which may indicate a more serious problem."

nadia_badarudin@nst.com.my