

# Health Pulse

magazine



**Editorial:**

Young and at Risk:  
Lifestyle Crisis Fueling  
Kidney Disease in Ghana.  
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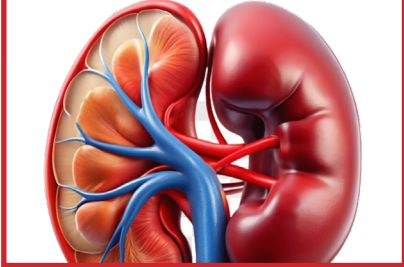
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What Your Skin Reveals  
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## HCOWAA: Advancing Healthcare Standards in West Africa

The Health Community of West Africa Association (HCOWAA), based in Ghana, is a non-governmental organization dedicated to advancing healthcare across West Africa. Addressing the uneven distribution of medical resources, HCOWAA advocates for regional cooperation through a Health Alliance that unites healthcare stakeholders to create a cohesive health community.

With a mission to improve health outcomes in West Africa, HCOWAA facilitates collaboration, innovation, and research among professionals, leveraging collective resources to enhance healthcare services, policies, and access. HCOWAA envisions a resilient West African healthcare system where institutions and professionals lead groundbreaking research, foster innovation, and influence policies that elevate regional healthcare.

Through initiatives like establishing a regional healthcare database, launching research projects, and hosting policy roundtables, HCOWAA builds strong networks to drive healthcare advancements. Advocacy efforts focus on equitable access, supporting vulnerable populations, and addressing healthcare disparities. The organization's objectives include fostering research and innovation, supporting health policy reforms, and integrating medical equipment manufacturers with healthcare facilities.

HCOWAA also facilitates training programs, academic exchanges, and research grants, ensuring members are equipped with knowledge and skills to address regional health challenges effectively. Networking events like the HCOWAA Medical and Health Industry Investment Summit & Expo connect professionals, offering a platform for partnership and knowledge sharing.

HCOWAA's commitment extends to partnerships with international health organizations and academic institutions, which amplify its impact by introducing global best practices and strengthening West African healthcare infrastructure. Collaborative efforts with international partners promote training, research, and infrastructure upgrades for health facilities, pharmaceutical establishments, and clinics.

In addition, HCOWAA's magazine partnerships, including an MoU with Health Pulse Magazine, provide platforms to publish relevant content, share insights, and enhance visibility for ongoing initiatives. Through these combined efforts, HCOWAA aims to foster a collaborative healthcare environment that not only addresses urgent health challenges but also builds a sustainable, inclusive healthcare future for West Africa.

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# Young and at Risk:

## Lifestyle Crisis Fueling Kidney Disease in Ghana.

Kidney disease is no longer an illness confined to old age. In Ghana today, it is increasingly affecting young adults those between 20 and 50 years who should be at the peak of their productivity. This disturbing trend signals a deeper problem rooted in modern lifestyle choices, and it demands urgent attention.

Many patients only discover their condition when their kidneys have already failed completely. At that stage, the only options are dialysis or a kidney transplant both financially out of reach for most Ghanaians. For young people, this is not just a health crisis; it is a life-altering setback that disrupts careers, families, and future ambitions.

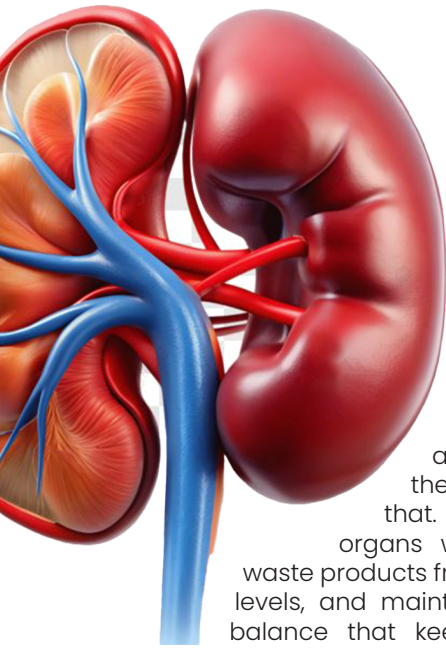
What makes this situation even more troubling is that much of it is preventable. The lifestyles many young people are adopting today high consumption of processed foods, sugary drinks, and excessive salt—are major contributors to conditions like hypertension and diabetes, which in turn damage the kidneys. Everyday items such as canned foods, sausages, corned beef, and salted fish may be convenient and affordable, but their long-term health consequences are severe.

At the same time, physical inactivity is becoming more common. Sedentary routines, long hours spent sitting, and limited exercise are increasing health risks. Yet, simple habits like brisk walking, jogging, or regular workouts for just 30 to 60 minutes a few times a week can significantly reduce the likelihood of developing kidney-related conditions.

Another hidden danger lies in the misuse of painkillers and unregulated herbal medicines. Many young people self-medicate without understanding the risks. These substances can gradually damage the kidneys, often without immediate symptoms. The story of a 21-year-old woman who developed severe kidney disease after prolonged use of herbal remedies is a stark warning that “natural” does not always mean safe.

Ultimately, the rise of kidney disease among young Ghanaians is a reflection of everyday choices. While economic realities make healthy living challenging, awareness and intentional habits can make a difference. Protecting one’s kidneys starts early and the decisions made today will determine the quality of life tomorrow.





# The Kidneys

The kidneys are among the most vital organs in the human body, yet they are often overlooked until something goes wrong. Many people associate kidney health only with alcohol consumption, but the kidneys do far more than that. These small, bean-shaped organs work continuously to filter waste products from the blood, regulate fluid levels, and maintain the delicate chemical balance that keeps the body functioning properly.

Globally, kidney disease has become a major public health concern. According to the Global Burden of Disease Study (2023), about 788 million people worldwide are living with chronic kidney disease, and the condition accounts for approximately 1.48 million deaths each year. One of the most concerning aspects of kidney disease is that it often develops slowly and without noticeable symptoms. Many individuals only discover they have kidney problems after significant damage has already occurred.

Located on either side of the spine just below the rib cage, each kidney is roughly the size of a fist. Despite their small size, the kidneys perform several essential functions. They filter large volumes of blood each day, removing toxins while allowing vital nutrients to remain in circulation. They also regulate fluid levels in the body by controlling the amount of water excreted in urine.

In addition, the kidneys maintain the balance of important minerals such as sodium, potassium, and calcium, which are crucial for proper nerve function, muscle activity, and heart rhythm. They also produce hormones that help control blood pressure and stimulate the production of red blood cells. The kidneys even work closely with the lungs to maintain the body's acid-base balance.

When the kidneys begin to fail, waste products accumulate in the bloodstream. This can lead to symptoms such as fatigue, nausea, loss of appetite, and general weakness. Kidney damage can also disrupt blood pressure regulation, often causing hypertension. Unfortunately, high blood pressure can further damage the kidneys, creating a cycle that worsens the condition.

Fluid retention is another common effect of kidney failure. When the kidneys cannot remove excess water effectively, fluid may accumulate in tissues,

leading to swelling in the legs, ankles, and face. In severe cases, fluid can collect in the lungs, causing breathing difficulties and serious respiratory complications.

Several everyday habits can negatively affect kidney health. Dehydration, for example, can cause minerals and salts in urine to become concentrated, increasing the risk of kidney stones. Diets high in salt may raise blood pressure, placing additional strain on the kidneys. Frequent and unsupervised use of certain medications, particularly non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), may also damage kidney tissue over time. Smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and diets high in processed foods can further increase the risk of kidney disease. Certain individuals face a higher risk of kidney disease, especially those living with diabetes, high blood pressure, or obesity. Age and family history may also increase susceptibility.

Although kidney disease can be serious, many cases can be prevented through healthy lifestyle choices. Drinking enough water, reducing salt intake, exercising regularly, and managing blood pressure and blood sugar levels are essential steps. Regular medical check-ups and simple blood or urine tests can also help detect early signs of kidney problems before symptoms appear. The kidneys play a crucial role in maintaining overall health. By adopting healthy habits and staying proactive about medical care, individuals can significantly reduce their risk of kidney disease and protect these essential organs for years to come.



**Seth O. Konadu**

RRT, CRT

# Hearing Loss in Children:

## A Silent Crisis with Lifelong Consequences.

Hearing loss refers to any degree of hearing impairment, ranging from mild difficulty detecting soft sounds to profound inability to hear. A person is considered to have hearing loss when their hearing thresholds exceed 25 decibels in both ears. Globally, hearing loss is a growing public health concern. According to the World Health Organization, more than 1.5 billion people live with some degree of hearing loss, and nearly 430 million experience disabling hearing impairment. A significant proportion of those affected live in low- and middle-income countries where access to ear and hearing care services remains limited.

Among the most vulnerable are children. Hearing loss affects approximately 90 million children and adolescents aged 5 to 19 worldwide, yet many cases remain undiagnosed, particularly in resource-limited settings. When left unaddressed, hearing loss can profoundly affect speech development, language acquisition, academic performance, and social integration. Over time, this may translate into reduced employment opportunities and long-term economic disadvantage.

Hearing loss in children may be congenital, meaning present at birth, or acquired later in life. Genetic factors account for a substantial number of congenital cases, sometimes occurring as part of broader syndromes and other times as isolated hearing impairment. Complications during pregnancy and delivery also contribute significantly. Maternal infections such as rubella or cytomegalovirus, prematurity, low birth weight, and birth asphyxia can all damage the developing auditory system.

Acquired hearing loss commonly results from preventable or treatable conditions. Recurrent ear infections, including otitis media with effusion and chronic suppurative otitis media, remain widespread causes in many communities. Other contributors include meningitis, head trauma, exposure to

excessive noise, and the use of ototoxic medications such as certain antibiotics and chemotherapy agents. Impacted earwax, though simple to treat, is another overlooked cause of temporary hearing impairment in children.

Encouragingly, many causes of childhood hearing loss are preventable. Public health measures such as immunization, improved maternal care, prompt treatment of infections, and safer listening practices can significantly reduce risk. In fact, it is estimated that up to 60 percent of childhood hearing loss is preventable through effective public health strategies.



**Dr. Solomon Sackitey**  
ENT Specialist, Greater Accra  
Regional Hospital

Early identification is essential. Universal newborn hearing screening within the first month of life, using objective tests such as otoacoustic emissions or auditory brainstem response, allows for prompt diagnosis. Beyond infancy, developmental monitoring remains crucial. Parents and caregivers should watch for missed speech milestones, lack of response to sounds, or frequent requests for repetition. Routine school-based hearing screening also plays an important role in detecting late-onset or progressive loss.

Management depends on the cause and severity of impairment. Medical and surgical treatment can resolve many conductive causes, particularly infections. Hearing aids and cochlear implants

provide significant benefit for children with permanent hearing loss. Equally important are speech therapy, auditory rehabilitation, educational accommodations, and family support services that help children thrive socially and academically.

Hearing loss in children is a significant public health issue with lifelong consequences if not addressed early. Early screening, parental vigilance, and timely intervention are the cornerstones of effective management. With proper medical care, assistive technology, and educational support, children with hearing loss can achieve strong developmental and social outcomes.



# Women's health and down syndrome: care and awareness

By Alberta Okyere

World Down Syndrome Day, celebrated every year on March 21, is a global initiative aimed at raising awareness about Down syndrome and promoting inclusion, health, and well-being for people living with the condition. This day provides an opportunity to focus on the unique health needs of women with Down syndrome, who face specific challenges that require tailored care and support.

One of the key areas of concern is reproductive health. While fertility is often reduced, some women with Down syndrome can become pregnant, making access to sexual and reproductive health education essential. Healthcare providers must guide women through options for contraception, pregnancy planning, and prenatal care, ensuring informed choices and safe practices.

Hormonal health and menstrual care are also important. Women with Down syndrome may experience irregular cycles, early menopause, or other hormonal imbalances. Regular medical monitoring can help manage these issues, while healthy lifestyle practices, including a balanced diet and physical activity, support overall hormonal balance and well-being.

Preventive care is critical in reducing the risk of secondary health conditions. Women with Down syndrome are more prone to thyroid disorders, obesity,

diabetes, and cardiovascular problems. Routine check-ups, screenings, and early intervention can significantly improve health outcomes, allowing for timely treatment and improved quality of life.

Mental health and social well-being are equally important. Anxiety, depression, or social isolation may occur due to stigma or limited access to supportive services. Promoting mental health awareness, providing counseling, and encouraging social engagement are essential steps in supporting the overall wellness of women with Down syndrome. Education and advocacy remain central to improving health outcomes. Families, caregivers, and communities must collaborate to ensure that women with Down syndrome have access to quality healthcare, nutritious diets, physical activity, and inclusive social environments.

In conclusion, women with Down syndrome have distinct health needs that deserve attention, care, and community support. Observing World Down Syndrome Day on March 21 reminds us of the importance of awareness, preventive healthcare, and inclusion. By addressing reproductive, hormonal, physical, and mental health, society can empower women with Down syndrome to lead healthy, fulfilling, and meaningful lives.



# WHO Announces Updated Flu Vaccine Formula for 2026-2027 Season

The World Health Organization (WHO) has released its recommendations for the composition of influenza vaccines for the 2026-2027 northern hemisphere season, following a four-day consultation with global experts. The updated formula is designed to target the influenza strains expected to circulate later this year, offering optimal protection against severe illness.

The announcement comes as health officials note that influenza viruses are constantly evolving, requiring regular updates to vaccine formulations. This year's recommendation follows the emergence of a new variant of the A(H3N2) virus in August 2025. Classified as a "subclade K" strain, this variant spread rapidly across the globe, contributing to an earlier start to the flu season in many countries and higher-than-usual levels of activity.

According to WHO surveillance data, influenza A viruses were predominant over the past season, with the new A(H3N2) variant accounting for the majority of cases reported across regions. Other variants of A(H3N2) and A(H1N1) were also detected, while influenza B viruses remained at low levels. Notably, no cases of the B/Yamagata lineage have been recorded since March 2020, confirming its continued absence from circulation.

For the upcoming season, WHO recommends that egg-based vaccines contain strains similar to A/Missouri/11/2025 (H1N1), A/Darwin/1454/2025 (H3N2), and B/Tokyo/EIS13-175/2025 (B/Victoria lineage). For cell culture-based, recombinant, or nucleic

acid-based vaccines, the recommendations include strains similar to A/Missouri/11/2025, A/Darwin/1415/2025, and B/Pennsylvania/14/2025.

"Season after season, constantly evolving influenza viruses circulate globally, showing us how connected our world is, shared risks require shared action. Thanks to the Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System, next season's vaccines have been updated to counter the latest strains, in turn better protecting communities," said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General.

The consultation also reviewed zoonotic influenza viruses, including avian flu strains that have caused human infections. Since September 2025, 25 human cases of zoonotic influenza were reported from six countries, though no human-to-human transmission was documented. Experts recommended the development of a new candidate vaccine virus for an A(H9N2) strain as a precaution against potential pandemic threats.

Seasonal influenza remains a significant global health burden, with an estimated one billion cases annually and up to 650,000 respiratory deaths. National regulatory agencies and pharmaceutical companies will now use WHO's recommendations to develop and license vaccines for the upcoming season.

**Source: WHO**

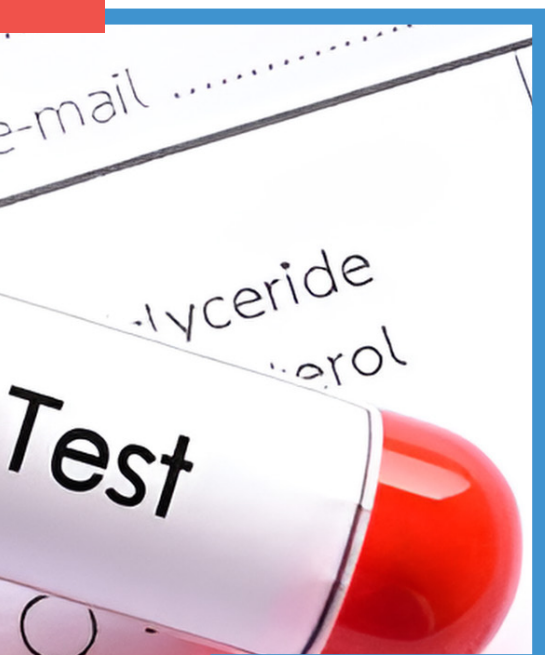


# Creatinine and the Limits of Kidney Function Testing



Across the world and even more in Africa, chronic kidney disease rises quietly. Many people go to the hospital and are reassured that their kidney test results are "normal" only to be diagnosed with chronic kidney disease months or years later. The problem is not always the absence of testing or false results. It is the over reliance on one marker to check kidney functionality; creatinine.

Creatinine is a waste product formed from the normal breakdown creatine in the muscle. Every day, our muscles produce it at a relatively steady rate as we engage them in our day to day activities. Though not inherently toxic, the kidneys filter it from the blood and remove it in urine as most waste substances in the body.



**Samuel Boye Hinson**  
Medical Lab Scientist

Because of this, doctors use blood creatinine levels to estimate how well the kidneys are filtering; a function known as the glomerular filtration rate (GFR). This is then used to estimate kidney damage and efficacy. However, creatinine does not directly measure kidney damage. It only reflects how efficiently the kidneys are clearing this waste product. Factors such as age, sex and muscle mass greatly influence creatinine levels.

A muscular young man may have a “high” creatinine but perfectly healthy kidneys due to his muscles and an elderly or malnourished individual may have a “normal” creatinine despite significantly reduced kidney function. This makes the use of creatinine levels to estimate kidney damage very misleading. The kidneys are remarkably resilient organs. Each kidney contains thousands of filtering units known as nephrons. When some are damaged, the others compensate. Because of this compensation system, up to 50% of kidney function can be lost before creatinine rises above the normal range. This means that kidney disease can silently progress for years while blood results appear to be “normal”. By the time creatinine, the marker, significantly increases, the damage may already be advanced and sometimes irreversible. This is why chronic kidney disease is often called a silent disease.

To address this limitation, laboratories have now adapted something more informative; the estimated Glomerular Filtration Rate (eGFR) which raw adjusts for factors such as age and sex. This provides a more accurate estimate of kidney function. That way, two people can have the same creatinine level but very different eGFR values based on their actual kidney function.

Kidney disease affects the skeleton, the heart, the blood, and the entire metabolic system. Kidney disease does not usually begin with pain or any obvious symptoms. It begins quietly and if we rely on only one marker, we may miss the early whisper before the eventual scream. Early testing, proper interpretation and timely intervention is paramount because when it comes to kidney health, what you don't see can hurt you.

# Malawi Strikes Back Against Polio: 1.3 Million Children Vaccinated in Four-Day Emergency Campaign

Malawi has launched a rapid and decisive response to a newly detected polio threat, successfully vaccinating approximately 1.3 million children in just four days following the confirmation of a circulating variant poliovirus case in late January 2026 the first reported in the country since 2022.

The four-day vaccination campaign, conducted across eight districts in Malawi's Southern Region, deployed the novel oral poliomyelitis vaccine type 2 (nOPV2) in line with Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI) recommendations. An impressive 97% of targeted children were reached, with Blantyre District recording a remarkable 109% coverage surpassing its initial target. An additional 42,000 children who missed the campaign will be reached in follow-up rounds.

The outbreak was traced to an unvaccinated seven-year-old child and confirmed through environmental surveillance sites. Variant polioviruses of this type emerge in communities with low immunisation rates and spread through contaminated water or food, posing a serious risk even in

areas previously free of wild polio. Malawi received 1.7 million doses of nOPV2 from the International Coordinating Group on Vaccine Provision on February 10, 2026 and in a testament to operational efficiency, all doses were distributed to delivery points across targeted districts within just 12 hours.

Community engagement proved critical to the campaign's success. Social mobilisers, health workers, religious leaders, and traditional authorities worked together to combat misinformation and encourage reluctant families. Of 84 initially hesitant households, 45 ultimately accepted vaccination through targeted outreach efforts.

"Polio is a debilitating disease that can leave one with lifetime disability and sometimes death. But the good news is that it is preventable through vaccination, good personal hygiene and sanitation," said Dr Charles Chilambula, Deputy Minister of Health and Sanitation.

WHO supported the Ministry of Health throughout coordinating logistics, training local vaccinators, strengthening data management systems, and conducting real-time monitoring to ensure campaign quality and coverage standards were maintained.

Two additional national vaccination rounds are planned later in 2026. Health authorities remain on high alert, continuing active case searches and community follow-ups to ensure no child is left unprotected.

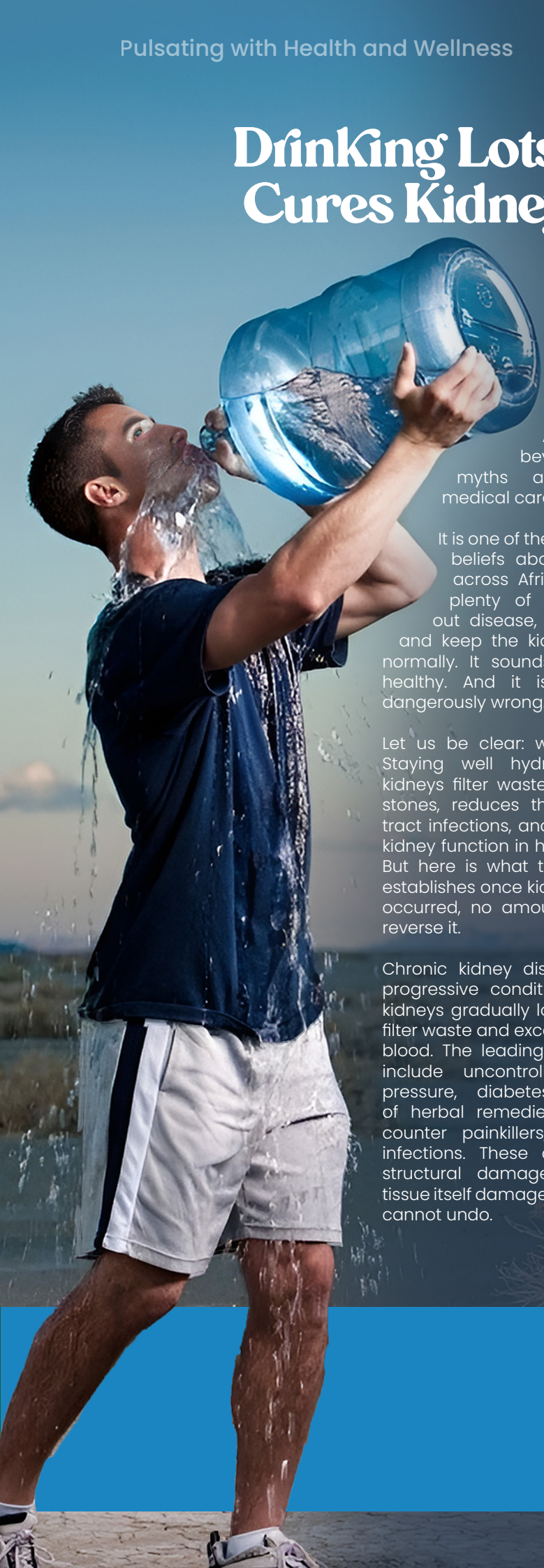
Source:WHO





# Drinking Lots of Water Cures Kidney Disease

By Marilyn Tiphaine Fifame



On World Kidney Day, experts urge Africans to move beyond dangerous myths and seek early medical care

It is one of the most widely held beliefs about kidney health across Africa that drinking plenty of water can flush out disease, reverse damage, and keep the kidneys functioning normally. It sounds logical. It feels healthy. And it is, in large part, dangerously wrong.

Let us be clear: water is essential. Staying well hydrated helps the kidneys filter waste, prevents kidney stones, reduces the risk of urinary tract infections, and supports overall kidney function in healthy individuals. But here is what the science firmly establishes once kidney damage has occurred, no amount of water can reverse it.

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a progressive condition in which the kidneys gradually lose their ability to filter waste and excess fluids from the blood. The leading causes in Africa include uncontrolled high blood pressure, diabetes, frequent use of herbal remedies and over-the-counter painkillers, and untreated infections. These conditions cause structural damage to the kidney tissue itself damage that water simply cannot undo.

In fact, for patients with advanced kidney disease, drinking excessive amounts of water can be actively harmful. When the kidneys are already struggling to regulate fluid balance, overhydration can cause dangerous fluid retention, swelling, elevated blood pressure, and in severe cases, heart complications.

The consequences of this myth are devastating across the continent. Many Africans delay seeking medical attention, believing their daily water intake is sufficient protection or treatment. By the time they reach a hospital, the disease has often progressed to an advanced sometimes irreversible stage.

Early detection is the real lifesaver. Simple, affordable blood and urine tests can detect kidney disease before symptoms appear. Controlling blood pressure and blood sugar, avoiding unsupervised herbal medicines, and limiting painkiller overuse are among the most evidence-based ways to protect kidney health.

This World Kidney Day, the message is urgent and clear: water is not medicine. Know your kidneys, get tested early, and seek professional care before it is too late.

# Healthy Mind, Healthy Kidneys:

## How Stress Affects More Than Just Your Mood

By Diana Yeboah

In today's fast-paced world, managing stress and maintaining good mental health is crucial—not just for emotional well-being, but also for physical health, including the kidneys. Chronic stress, anxiety, and unhealthy lifestyle habits can increase blood pressure and blood sugar levels, both of which are major risk factors for kidney disease. Protecting your mental health, therefore, directly contributes to keeping your kidneys healthy.

One way to support both mental and kidney health is through effective time management and regular breaks. A busy lifestyle often leads to prolonged stress, which triggers the release of hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. These hormones can elevate blood pressure, reducing blood flow to the kidneys and potentially causing long-term damage. By creating a daily schedule, prioritizing tasks, and taking short relaxation breaks, individuals can reduce stress levels and help their kidneys function optimally.

Physical activity is another key factor. Exercise not only improves mood and reduces anxiety but also strengthens cardiovascular health, helping maintain normal blood pressure and better kidney perfusion. Activities like walking, cycling, yoga, or stretching can lower stress while protecting vital organs. In addition, getting adequate sleep allows the body to repair itself, balancing both mental and kidney function. Sleep deprivation, on the other hand, is linked to higher stress levels and increased risk of kidney problems.

Nutrition bridges mental and kidney health as well. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains

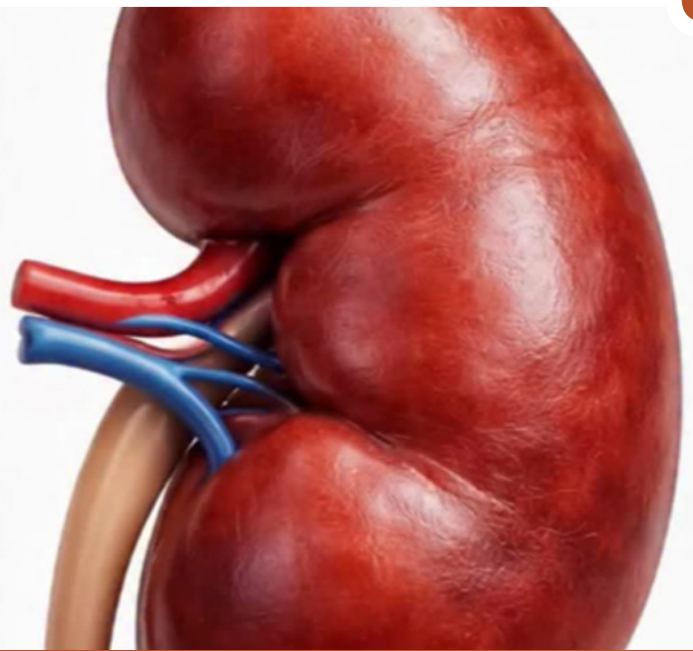
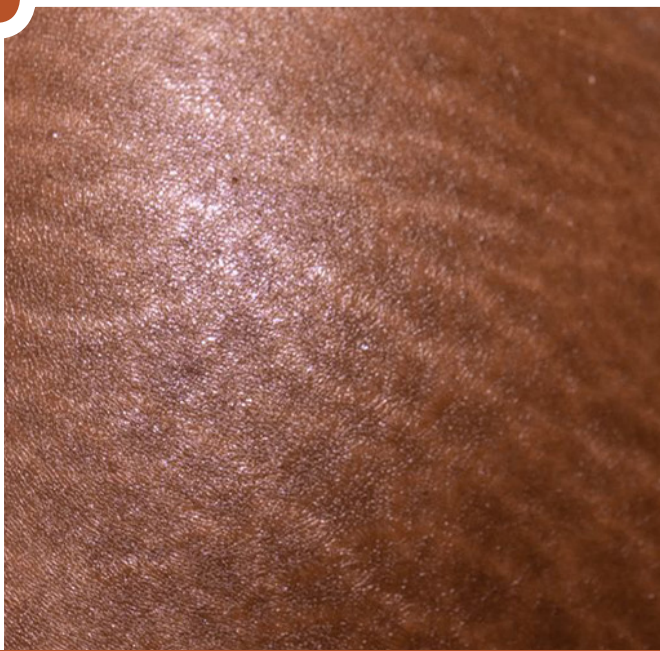
supports brain function and helps regulate blood pressure. Avoiding excessive salt, sugar, and processed foods reduces the burden on kidneys while also improving mood and energy levels. Staying well-hydrated is equally important, as it helps kidneys flush out toxins efficiently.

Social support also plays an essential role. Strong relationships and emotional support can reduce stress and encourage healthy habits, such as regular check-ups, balanced diet, and exercise. Managing negative emotions and seeking help when needed prevents the adoption of risky behaviors, like smoking or excessive alcohol consumption, which can harm kidney function.

In conclusion, taking care of mental health in a busy world does more than improve mood and productivity—it also protects your kidneys. By managing stress, staying active, eating healthily, getting enough sleep, and nurturing supportive relationships, individuals can maintain emotional balance while reducing the risk of kidney-related complications. A healthy mind and healthy kidneys go hand in hand, ensuring a longer, more fulfilling life.

# What Your Skin Reveals About Your Kidney

By Alberta okyere



The skin often reflects the health of the body's internal organs, including the kidneys. The kidneys play an essential role in filtering waste products, balancing minerals, and regulating fluids in the body. When kidney function declines, toxins and excess substances accumulate in the bloodstream. This buildup can lead to several skin disorders that may affect a person's comfort, appearance, and overall quality of life.

One of the most common skin conditions seen in people with kidney disease is uremic pruritus, a condition characterized by persistent itching. This occurs when waste products build up in the blood because the kidneys are unable to filter them effectively. The itching can be intense and often worsens at night, disturbing sleep and causing discomfort. Continuous scratching may also lead to skin damage or infection.

Another frequent skin problem associated with kidney disease is xerosis, which refers to extremely dry skin. In individuals with kidney problems, the skin's sweat and oil glands may become less active. This leads to dryness, flaking, and rough patches on the skin. Dry skin can also worsen itching, creating a cycle of irritation and discomfort.

Some people with advanced kidney disease may develop a rare but serious condition known as

calciophylaxis. This disorder occurs when calcium accumulates in the small blood vessels of the skin and fatty tissues. As a result, painful skin lesions, dark patches, or ulcers may appear. Calciophylaxis requires urgent medical attention because it can lead to severe tissue damage.

Another condition linked to severe kidney problems is nephrogenic systemic fibrosis. This disorder causes the skin to become thick, hard, and tight. Over time, the skin may lose flexibility, making movement difficult and uncomfortable for affected individuals.

In addition to these disorders, kidney disease may also cause changes in skin color, swelling, rashes, or small calcium deposits under the skin due to mineral imbalances in the body.

In conclusion, skin disorders are common in people with kidney disease and can serve as important warning signs of underlying health problems. Recognizing these skin changes early and seeking proper medical care can help manage symptoms and improve both kidney health and overall well-being.

# 2026

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# Kidney Health in Women:

## Risks, Prevention, and Management.

Kidney health is an important aspect of women's overall well-being. The kidneys are two bean-shaped organs located on either side of the spine, just below the rib cage. The kidney's functions include removing metabolic waste products, regulating fluid balance, maintaining electrolyte levels, controlling blood pressure, and producing hormones that support red blood cell production and bone health. When kidney function becomes impaired, it can lead to serious health complications. Women experience some unique risks related to kidney disease due to biological, hormonal, reproductive, and social factors.



**By Rev. Mrs. Charity  
Essie Djokoto**

Head of Nursing, Ghana College of  
Nurses & Midwives

### **Why Kidney Health is Especially Important in Women**

**Urinary Tract Infections (UTIs):** Bacterial infections affecting the bladder and kidneys. Women are more prone to UTIs than men due to their shorter urethra, making it easier for bacteria to enter the urinary tract. Recurrent UTIs could lead to kidney infections.

**Pregnancy:** the state of being pregnant leads to issues such as increased blood volume, hormonal changes, ureter compression from the growing foetus these can cause issues, especially in women with pre-existing conditions. Pregnancy-related complications blood pressure changes such as preeclampsia can damage the kidneys and increase the risk of future chronic kidney disease. Example: a pregnant woman develops high blood pressure and protein in her urine (preeclampsia), which may temporarily impair kidney function.

**Autoimmune diseases:** Women are more likely to develop autoimmune diseases such as Systemic Lupus Erythematosus which can cause kidney inflammation (lupus nephritis).

**Socioeconomic factors:** In many settings, women have limited access to healthcare, leading to delayed diagnosis and treatment of kidney conditions.

**Kidney Stones:** Hard deposits of minerals and salts in the kidney causing blockage and pain. Dehydration and mostly diets high in animal protein (uric acid), processed foods and high salt intake as well as sugar (fructose) can contribute to stone formation.

**Long-term use of certain medications:** prolonged use of gentamycin, pain medications including acetaminophen in high doses and NSAIDs is another risk

**Diabetes:** High blood sugar levels damages kidneys over time.

**Hypertension:** High blood pressure strains kidneys, affecting their function.

**Other risk factors include:**

Family History of kidney disease and being Obese as well as Severe dehydration due to severe diarrhoea, vomiting or low water intake leading to Acute Kidney Injury (AKI) which is sudden decline in kidney function, lifestyle risks include smoking.

**Symptoms**

Early stages of kidney damage may show no symptoms, but later stages include Fatigue, Nausea, Swelling of legs and feet, Decreased urine output and High blood pressure

**Prevention of Kidney Disease in Women**

Preventive measures can significantly reduce the risk of kidney disease.

- Maintain Healthy Blood Pressure by regular monitoring and controlling hypertension.
- Women with diabetes should control blood sugar by maintain optimal glucose levels.
- Ensure adequate hydration by drinking sufficient water to help keep blood volume.

- Maintain healthy diet habit of low salt intake, increased fruits and vegetables, and reduced processed foods

- Avoid misuse of medications, especially overuse of painkillers
- Prompt treatment of infections, especially UTIs prevents kidney complications.

**Management of Kidney Disease**

Management depends on the stage and severity of kidney disease.

- Medications to control blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol and anaemia
- When kidneys fail, dialysis may be required to filter waste and water from the blood.
- Kidney Transplant may be necessary in end-stage kidney disease
- Lifestyle management such as following a renal diet, reducing sodium intake monitoring fluid intake, maintaining healthy weight and avoiding smoking becomes necessary changes one can make in the control of kidney function.



# Why immunization matters to men

Immunization plays an important role in protecting men's health and preventing many serious diseases. While vaccines are often associated with childhood, they are equally important for adults. Many men underestimate the importance of staying up to date with their vaccinations, yet immunization can protect them from infections that may lead to long-term health complications.

Vaccines work by helping the body's immune system recognize and fight harmful viruses and bacteria. When a person is vaccinated, the immune system learns how to defend itself against specific diseases without the person having to suffer from the illness. This protection can last for years and, in some cases, for a lifetime.

For men, certain vaccines are particularly important. The tetanus vaccine protects against a dangerous bacterial infection that can enter the body through cuts or wounds.

Men who work in environments such as construction, farming, or manual labor may be at higher risk of injury, making tetanus vaccination essential.

Another important vaccine for men is the hepatitis B vaccine. Hepatitis B is a viral infection that affects the liver and can lead to chronic liver disease, liver failure, or liver cancer. The virus can spread through contact with infected blood or bodily fluids. Vaccination provides strong protection and is recommended for adults who have not previously received it.



The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine is also beneficial for men. Although HPV is often discussed in relation to women's health, it can also cause health problems in men, including genital warts and certain cancers such as throat, anal, and penile cancer. Vaccination helps reduce these risks and also helps prevent the spread of the virus to others.

Seasonal influenza (flu) vaccines are another important part of men's health. Influenza can lead to severe illness, especially for men with underlying conditions such as heart

disease, diabetes, or asthma. Annual vaccination helps reduce the risk of infection and complications.

Immunization not only protects individual men but also contributes to community health by reducing the spread of infectious diseases. By keeping vaccinations up to date, men can safeguard their well-being, protect their families, and maintain a healthier life.

Health experts therefore encourage men to consult healthcare professionals regularly to ensure they receive the recommended vaccines for their age and lifestyle.



# Understanding Down Syndrome: Building Awareness and Support

According to the Down Syndrome Association of Ghana, approximately 31,000 people are living with Down syndrome in Ghana. In many communities, understanding of the condition is still limited. Misconceptions and incomplete information can sometimes shape how individuals with Down syndrome are perceived and supported. Increasing awareness and promoting accurate information are important steps toward building more inclusive and supportive communities.

Down syndrome is a genetic condition that occurs when a person is born with an extra copy of chromosome 21. This additional genetic material affects the way the body and brain develops. Individuals with Down syndrome may experience developmental delays and certain health challenges, but each person's abilities and experiences are unique.

Individuals with Down syndrome often share certain developmental and physical characteristics. Many babies with the condition have what health professionals call low muscle tone, which means their muscles may feel softer or less firm, sometimes making them seem a little "floppy" when held. Because of this, some children may take a bit more time to sit, crawl, or walk. Children with Down syndrome may also learn new skills such as speaking or communicating at a slower pace, but with patience, support, and the right learning environment, they continue to develop important abilities. Some individuals may also have physical features such as a flatter facial profile, eyes that slant slightly upward, a small nose, a slightly protruding tongue or a single line across the palm of the hand. In addition, some people with Down syndrome may experience certain health conditions, including heart problems or hearing and vision difficulties, which is why regular medical care is important.

It is important to remember that every person with Down syndrome is unique, with their own strengths, abilities, and personality.

## Helping Children Thrive

Children with Down syndrome often thrive when they receive support early in life. Early intervention programs are designed to help children develop skills they will use every day. Speech and language therapy or support, for example, helps children learn to speak, make sounds, or use gestures so they can communicate their needs and feelings. Movement and physical therapy and support can strengthen muscles, improve balance, and make activities like sitting, walking, and playing easier. Daily life skills, guided through occupational therapy, teach children how to feed themselves, dress, hold objects, and play skills that help them become more independent as they grow.



**Ethel Selasi Dei**

Occupational Therapist

Regular check-ups allow doctors to monitor heart, hearing, vision, and other health concerns. When any problems are detected early, families and healthcare professionals can work together to manage them effectively.

Families, schools, and communities are part of the support network too. Inclusive classrooms, where children with Down syndrome learn alongside other children, encourage friendships, social skills, and confidence. In Ghana, there are inclusive schools that provide such learning environments, helping children with Down syndrome participate in education alongside their peers. Communities that understand and accept differences create spaces where individuals with Down syndrome can fully take part in family life and social activities. Organizations such as the Down Syndrome

Association of Ghana also provide guidance, raise awareness, and connect families with resources and support programs. With the right guidance and encouragement, children with Down syndrome can play, learn, and laugh alongside their friends, just like any other child.

By learning more about Down syndrome and the ways children and adults can be supported, we can all play a part in creating a more understanding and inclusive community. Families, schools, and communities that offer encouragement and support help individuals with Down syndrome grow, learn, and take part fully in everyday life because when we focus on inclusion, care, and understanding, everyone benefits and people with Down syndrome can thrive and be valued for who they are.



# Women's Health Across the Lifespan:

## Prevention, Awareness, and Empowerment

### Introduction

Women's health is a critical part of community health, yet it is sometimes discussed only in relation to pregnancy or childbirth. In reality, women's health is much broader. It includes physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being throughout every stage of life—from adolescence to adulthood and into menopause. Understanding these different stages and the health challenges that can arise is essential for prevention and early treatment.

In this interview, Nurse Akpor shares her professional insights on the common health issues affecting women, the importance of preventive care, and how women can take proactive steps to protect their well-being.

**Q: To start, how would you define women's health, and why is it important to approach it holistically?**



**Saphira Adjeley  
Naa Akpor**

Nurse, Essence clinic and  
medical laboratory

Women's health is about the overall well-being of women at every stage of life. It goes beyond reproductive health to include physical health, mental health, emotional well-being, and even social factors that influence a woman's life. As healthcare providers, we recognize that these aspects are interconnected. For instance, stress can affect sleep, menstrual cycles, and even blood pressure. That is why we must look at the whole person rather than focusing on a single symptom.

**Q: What are some of the most common health issues affecting women in our communities today?**

Many women in our communities experience reproductive health challenges such as menstrual irregularities, infections, and fertility issues. We also see cases of cervical cancer and breast cancer, which remain major health concerns for women. In addition, non-communicable diseases like hypertension, diabetes, and anemia are becoming increasingly common. Another issue that is often overlooked is mental health. Many women juggle multiple responsibilities, and the stress associated with these roles can affect their emotional and physical well-being.

**Q: How does mental health affect women's overall health?**

Mental health is closely connected to physical health. Hormonal changes throughout a woman's life—such as during menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause—can influence mood and emotional balance. When stress, anxiety, or depression go untreated, they can lead to sleep problems, fatigue, and even physical illness. It is important for women to feel comfortable seeking help and discussing their mental health concerns with professionals or trusted support systems.

**Q: Many women experience menstrual discomfort. When should someone seek medical advice?**

Mild discomfort during menstruation can be normal, but severe pain should not be ignored. Women should seek medical attention if they experience extremely heavy bleeding, periods that last longer than seven days, or cycles that remain irregular for several months. These symptoms could indicate conditions such as fibroids, hormonal imbalances, or endometriosis. Early medical consultation helps ensure proper diagnosis and treatment.

**Q: How important is preventive healthcare for women?**

Preventive healthcare is extremely important. Routine screenings help detect health problems early, sometimes before symptoms even appear. Regular checks for blood pressure, blood sugar levels, and general health are essential. For women, cervical cancer screening through Pap smears is very important because it helps identify abnormal cells early. Breast health is also a priority, and women should practice breast self-examination and undergo mammograms when recommended by healthcare professionals.

**Q: Can you explain why breast self-examination is important?**

Breast self-examination helps women become familiar with their bodies so they can notice any unusual changes. By regularly checking for lumps, thickening, or visible changes in the breast, women can detect possible problems early. Early detection greatly improves treatment outcomes, which is why awareness and education about breast health are so important.

**Q: What signs might indicate hormonal imbalance or reproductive health concerns?**

Symptoms such as irregular menstrual cycles, unexplained weight gain or loss, persistent fatigue, severe acne, mood swings, or difficulty conceiving can sometimes indicate hormonal imbalances. These symptoms should not be ignored. Consulting a healthcare provider allows women to receive proper evaluation and guidance on possible

treatment options.

Q: What role does family planning play in women's health?

Family planning is an important part of women's health and empowerment. It allows women to make informed decisions about if and when they want to have children. There are several safe contraceptive options available, including pills, injections, implants, and intrauterine devices. The best option depends on a woman's health status, lifestyle, and personal preferences, so consultation with a healthcare professional is always recommended.

**Q: What advice would you give to women about prioritizing their health?**

Many women prioritize their families and responsibilities above their own health, but self-care is essential. Women should make time for regular medical check-ups, maintain a balanced diet, stay physically active, and manage stress. When women take care of their own health, they are better able to support their families and contribute positively to their communities.

**Q: Finally, what message would you like women to take away about their health?**

My message is simple: do not ignore your health. Early detection and preventive care can save lives. Women should not let fear, stigma, or misinformation prevent them from seeking medical attention. By staying informed, asking questions, and prioritizing their well-being, women can live healthier and more fulfilling lives.



# Beet and Quinoa Salad Recipe

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Beets are a superfood for your kidneys! Rich in antioxidants and nitrates, they help lower blood pressure and improve kidney function. Paired with quinoa, a great source of protein and fiber, this salad is a slam dunk for your health.

Ingredients:

- 1 cup quinoa, rinsed and drained
- 2 cups water
- 2 medium beets, peeled and diced
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1/4 cup chopped walnuts (optional)
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions:

1. Cook quinoa in water (about 15-20 mins).
2. Steam beets until tender (20-25 mins).
3. Mix cooked quinoa, beets, parsley, and walnuts.
4. Whisk olive oil and lemon juice; toss with salad.
5. Season with salt and pepper.



# Is Your Family Fully Protected?

By Priscilla Akorfa Fomevor

A family's health is a shared journey, and one of the most powerful tools we have to protect every member is immunization. Vaccination is not just a childhood ritual; it is a lifelong strategy for wellness that begins before a baby is born and continues through the senior years. For parents, understanding how to navigate this path ensures that their loved ones are shielded from serious, preventable diseases at every stage of life.

The journey typically begins in infancy, guided by the schedule recommended by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This carefully designed timeline ensures that children receive protection when they are most vulnerable. By following this schedule, parents can safeguard their little ones from diseases like measles, mumps, whooping cough, and polio before they are ever exposed to them. Staying on track with these appointments provides the foundational immunity a child needs to grow and thrive.

However, the conversation about vaccines should not end as children grow older. Immunization is equally critical during the preteen and teen years. As children enter adolescence, the protection from some early childhood vaccines can begin to wane, and they face new risks. This is the time to discuss important vaccines with a healthcare provider, including the Tdap booster, which protects against tetanus, diphtheria, and whooping cough, as well as the meningitis and HPV vaccines. These immunizations are crucial for protecting teens through their school years and into young adulthood.

Protecting the family through immunization is an ongoing process. By keeping up with well-child visits and annual check-ups for the whole family, parents can ensure that everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, has the protection they need to stay healthy.



# Shielding Children from Preventable Diseases: The Power of Immunisation

Immunisation remains one of the most powerful and cost-effective ways to protect children and communities from life-threatening diseases. Yet misinformation, fear, and missed appointments continue to leave many children vulnerable. In this edition, a public health nurse sheds light on why vaccines matter, addresses common concerns, and explains how timely immunisation can safeguard the health and future of every child.

**Q: What is immunisation, and why is it considered one of the most important public health interventions for children and communities?**

Immunisation is the process of protecting the body against infectious diseases by giving vaccines that help the immune system recognize and fight harmful germs. It is one of the most effective public health measures because it prevents serious illnesses, reduces child mortality, and protects communities from disease outbreaks.

**Q: Which vaccines are included in the routine immunisation schedule for children, and what diseases do they protect against?**

Routine childhood vaccines protect against diseases such as Tuberculosis, Polio, Measles, Hepatitis B, Diphtheria, Pertussis, and Tetanus. These vaccines are given at specific ages to ensure children develop strong protection early in life.



**Q: Many parents worry about vaccine safety. How safe are vaccines, and what reassurance can you give to families who are hesitant?**

Vaccines are very safe. They go through strict testing and approval processes before being used. As healthcare professionals, we reassure families that vaccines have saved millions of lives worldwide and are carefully monitored to ensure their safety.

**Q: What are some of the common side effects after immunisation, and when should parents be concerned enough to seek medical attention?**

Common side effects include mild fever, slight swelling, or pain at the injection site. These usually disappear within a day or two. Parents should seek medical attention if a child develops a very high fever, persistent crying, severe swelling, or difficulty breathing.



**Sylvia Kumahor**  
General nurse  
Korle bu teaching hospital



**Q: In some communities, children miss their vaccines. What are the risks of delayed or incomplete immunisation?**

Delayed or incomplete immunisation leaves children unprotected and increases their risk of contracting serious diseases. It can also lead to outbreaks of preventable illnesses within the community.

**Q: How does immunisation help protect not only individuals but also entire communities?**

When many people in a community are vaccinated, it reduces the spread of diseases. This protection is called Herd Immunity, which helps protect vulnerable individuals such as newborns and people with weak immune systems.

**Q: What myths or misconceptions about vaccines do you frequently encounter in your work, and**

**what is the truth behind them?**

A common myth is that vaccines cause serious diseases or infertility. The truth is that vaccines are designed to prevent diseases and have been proven safe and effective through years of research and monitoring.

**Q: What practical advice would you give parents to ensure their children stay up to date with their vaccination schedule?**

Parents should keep their child's vaccination card, attend scheduled clinic visits, and consult healthcare providers if they miss an appointment. Following the recommended schedule ensures children are protected at the right time.

# Menstrual Health Education

By Diana Yeboah

Another important aspect of menstrual health education is breaking the stigma associated with menstruation. In some communities, menstruating girls are considered unclean or are restricted from certain activities. These beliefs can negatively affect a girl's self-esteem and confidence. Open discussions about menstruation help normalize it as a natural part of life and encourage respect and understanding from everyone, including boys and men.

Menstrual health education plays an important role in promoting the well-being, dignity, and confidence of girls and women. Menstruation is a natural biological process that occurs in females during their reproductive years, yet in many societies it remains surrounded by myths, stigma, and silence. Because of this, many young girls grow up without proper knowledge about their bodies and how to manage their menstrual cycles safely and confidently.

Menstrual health education helps girls understand what menstruation is, why it occurs, and how to manage it in a healthy way.

When girls receive proper education before they begin menstruating, they are less likely to feel fear, confusion, or

embarrassment when they experience their first period. Instead, they can approach it with confidence and understanding.

An important part of menstrual health education is teaching good hygiene practices. Girls should learn how to use sanitary products such as pads, tampons, or menstrual cups, and how often to change them. Proper hygiene helps prevent infections and promotes overall reproductive health. Access to clean water, safe sanitation facilities, and affordable menstrual products is also essential for maintaining menstrual health.

Menstrual education also plays a major role in keeping girls in school. In many places, girls miss classes during their periods due to lack of sanitary products, inadequate toilet facilities, or fear of embarrassment. When schools provide proper menstrual education and supportive environments, girls are more likely to attend school regularly and participate fully in academic and social activities.



Parents, teachers, and health professionals all have an important role to play in providing accurate and supportive menstrual education. By creating safe spaces for open conversations, they can ensure that young girls feel supported and informed.

In conclusion, menstrual health education is essential for the physical, emotional, and social well-being of girls and women. By promoting knowledge, hygiene, and open discussions, societies can empower girls to manage their menstrual health with confidence and dignity.

# Health Terms

**Vaccine:**

A substance given to the body to build protection against a specific disease without causing the disease itself.

**Immunisation:**

The process of becoming protected against a disease through vaccination.

**Herd Immunity:**

When enough people in a community are vaccinated, protecting even those who cannot be vaccinated.

**Booster Dose:**

An extra vaccine dose given after the initial one to strengthen or renew protection.

**Vaccine-Preventable Disease:**

Any disease – such as measles, polio, or tetanus – that can be avoided entirely through vaccination.

**Down Syndrome:**

A genetic condition caused by an extra copy of chromosome 21, affecting a person’s physical and intellectual development.

**Trisomy 21:**

The medical name for Down syndrome, referring to three copies of chromosome 21 instead of the usual two.

**Early Intervention:**

Therapy and support programmes

started in infancy to help children with Down syndrome or vaccine-related conditions reach their full potential.

**Congenital Condition:**

A health condition present from birth – such as Down syndrome or congenital defects sometimes linked to vaccine-preventable infections like rubella.

**Inclusive Health Care:**

An approach ensuring that individuals with conditions such as Down syndrome receive equal access to vaccines, medical treatment, and community health services without discrimination.

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