



Membranous Glomerulonephritis/ Membranous Nephropathy FAQ

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What is Membranous Glomerulonephritis / Nephropathy (MGN)?

MGN is a disease of the filters of the kidney (glomeruli). Diseases of the filters of the kidney are called glomerulonephritis. MGN has its name because of the pattern that the doctor sees when looking at the kidney biopsy under the microscope.

In MGN, the filters of both kidneys are too leaky. Under the microscope the lining of the filter looks like a thick ribbon or “membrane”.

Why are the filters of the kidney important?

The filters do the work of the kidneys – they clean toxins from the blood, and prevent cells and protein from spilling into the urine.

What causes MGN?

An underlying infection (ex. Hepatitis), medication exposure, or immune disease (ex. Lupus) can cause MGN. Rarely MGN can appear because of a cancer. You will likely undergo a series of tests (ex. blood tests, xrays) to make sure that there is no specific cause that can be identified.

Most often, MGN develops for unknown reasons without an underlying trigger. It likely is a result of damage to the kidney by the body’s own immune system.

The immune system helps fight off infection, but sometimes the immune responses can harm the glomeruli when there is no infection present.

What are the symptoms and signs of MGN?

The group of signs and symptoms of MGN are referred to as the “nephrotic syndrome” which can include:

“Proteinuria” refers to protein spilling in the urine and it is found by testing the urine. Higher levels create bubbles in the urine. When protein a lot of protein spills into the urine, blood protein levels can be low.

“Edema” means swelling and it can be a sign of MGN. Swelling can mean that extra salt and water are being retained by the kidneys.



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High cholesterol is part of the nephrotic syndrome and is frequently seen in MGN.

“Hypertension” means high blood pressure. It has no symptoms unless dangerously high. It is common in MGN.

“Hematuria” means blood in the urine. It is usually invisible in MGN. Some people with MGN have no symptoms at all and only know about the condition because of urine tests. MGN does not cause pain.

“Creatinine” is a blood test used to estimate how well the kidneys are cleaning. Lower values mean the better the healthier kidneys.

What are the treatment options?

These fall into two categories:

1 – Treatments that do not affect the immune system: These include medicines to control blood pressure, manage swelling, and lower cholesterol. Stopping smoking and healthy lifestyle choices also protect kidneys. Sometimes blood thinning medications are used to prevent blood clots.

2 – Immune system lowering treatment: These medicines lower the body’s immune system so that it does not attack the glomeruli. These medicines can have more side effects and need to be carefully dosed and monitored.

How about my diet?

Your diet did not cause your kidney disease and changes in the diet have not been shown to cure MGN. However, some changes in diet (ex. Lowering salt) can definitely help with MGN and treatment side effects. Ask your doctor!

What can happen to people with MGN?

Sometimes MGN can permanently scar the kidneys and cause the kidneys to work less effectively (chronic kidney disease) or stop cleaning the blood (kidney failure). People with MGN are also at higher risk of having infections and blood clots.

Hope for the future

We have new tests and treatments for MGN to prevent permanent kidney damage and manage swelling, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol. Your doctors will work closely



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with you to keep you healthy! There are large networks of doctors and researchers studying MGN and new medicines. Participation in a research study is always optional but can be a rewarding experience. Ask your doctor about opportunities to participate in helping to find a cure!