

IgM NEPHROPATHY

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What does IgM Nephropathy mean?

IgM is short for Immunoglobulin M, one of the types of antibody the body produces to fight infection. This circulates in the blood. "Nephropathy" is a scientific term for kidney disease.

What is IgM Nephropathy?

There is scarring and inflammation within the kidney, that can only be seen clearly under the microscope. Therefore it is normally only diagnosed after a biopsy test of the kidney. What doctors see under the microscope is that the "glomeruli", which are the tiny structures which filter the blood to make urine, are damaged by deposits of IgM.

For a leaflet on what causes Glomerulonephritis ring the Helpline .

What are the symptoms of IgM Nephropathy?

These are variable from case to case. In most cases there are no symptoms, but the damage to the glomeruli causes some blood to appear in the urine. This blood is often invisible, and only detected on routine medical check-ups. In other cases the blood may be visible, coming in attacks every so often. Normally this condition is quite painless. However, in some cases there may be some pain over the kidneys, often occurring in attacks after a viral infection.

What causes IgM Nephropathy?

Basically no-one knows fully. IgM is part of the body's defence against infection. As the antibody travels around in the blood and passes through the kidney it can get deposited in the filters (glomeruli) and then can cause an inflammatory reaction. Doctors do not know why this happens, and unfortunately cannot stop it.

What will happen if I have IgM Nephropathy?

The outcome is very variable, and you will need to ask your specialist how things are likely to be in your case. The possibilities are:-

1. It may continue unchanged for many years, requiring only regular check-ups with blood tests. This is probably the case in a majority of patients.

2. It may go away on its own in some cases.
3. In occasional cases kidney failure develops, leading to the question of dialysis or transplantation.

What are the complications of IgM Nephropathy?

1. High blood pressure may develop. This damages the kidneys and puts a strain on the heart and the rest of the circulation. Therefore high blood pressure should be treated vigorously.
2. As noted above, kidney failure may sometimes occur. If so, it develops slowly, so you need not be concerned about a sudden change in your condition overnight.
3. There may be pain over the kidneys in a minority of cases.

Is there any Treatment?

This is not an easy condition to treat, and usually doctors rely on treatment of the blood pressure. Because the condition is caused by antibodies treatments to reduce antibody production might be logical. However the drugs used for this have many side effects, and such treatment is very experimental.

Can I lead a normal life with IgM Nephropathy?

In most cases this condition does not affect normal life in any way. There is no special diet that will make the disease go away or get worse. You can continue with physical exercise and sports quite safely. The condition does not generally run in families, so you need not worry about having children. There will be some queries if you apply for mortgages or life insurance, so plan ahead and be prepared to have your doctors asked to supply a medical report.