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Exercise for Chronic Kidney Disease

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Due to fatigue and muscle weakness, patients with chronic kidney disease (CKD) have low levels of physical activity¹. The decline in physical capacity in this patient cohort is noteworthy as it is associated with deconditioning and muscle wasting, declining kidney function and an increased risk of comorbidities such as cardiovascular disease². Thus a downward spiral between disease, disuse and deconditioning exists leading to a reduced quality of life, increased hospitalization rates and mortality.

Increasing physical activity is therefore an essential aspect of disease prevention and management in CKD patients. Current NKF KDOQI guidelines for clinical practice suggest that encouraging participation in physical activity should be part of the routine care plan³. These guidelines recommend “cardiovascular exercise at a moderate intensity for 30 minutes on most, if not all, days per week and that patients who are not currently physically active or are severely deconditioned should start at very low levels and durations, and gradually progress to this recommended level”³.

Over three decades of research has revealed a myriad of health benefits as a result of regular exercise in patients with CKD. These benefits include increased physical fitness and muscle strength; prevention of muscle wasting; improvement in cardiovascular health; improved nutritional parameters and a reduction of chronic inflammation⁴. In addition to physiological benefits, exercise improves health related quality of life and has shown psychological benefits such as decreases in anxiety, stress and depression in this patient population⁵.

Despite current guidelines and favorable evidence, exercise is still not prescribed as part of routine care for CKD patients. The multidisciplinary nephrology team is an integral part of

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encouraging and integrating physical activity and regular exercise into clinical practice. The nephrology dietitian is especially key since this individual can easily combine counseling for healthy eating habits with the need for exercise. The information provided is aimed to promote physical activity counseling and empower health providers to prescribe exercise a routine part of care for CKD patients.

Supplementary Material

Refer to Web version on PubMed Central for supplementary material.

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