

How do you test for CKD?

Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) is where the kidneys gradually stop functioning, and become less able to filter waste from your body. Detecting CKD at an early stage is important, so that measures can be taken to try to stop CKD progressing to kidney failure and the need for dialysis.

A key test is the estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR), which works out from a blood test how quickly the kidneys filter the blood to remove waste and toxins. A normal rate is 100mls per minute. The kidneys tend to work more slowly as you get older and around one in two people over 75 have an eGFR of less than 60. We monitor anyone with an eGFR lower than 60, to check for the level dropping further. We also check for protein leaking into the urine, as this is another important indicator of kidney disease.

As there are often no outward symptoms of CKD until the eGFR is so low that dialysis will soon be needed, it is important to monitor blood and urine tests for people at increased risk. This includes those with diabetes, who should be checked every year.

'I was in a very dark place – decades of pain but I turned

Author reveals how she stays positive despite burden of agonising disease

WORDS
SALLY MCDONALD

At just 17, Dunfermline lass Maureen Sharpnose was the star of her local stage at the Carnegie Hall, playing Carmen in the titular opera by Bizet. Graduating from Glasgow University with a Master of Arts degree and "big dreams and goals", she hit the stage of London's glitzy nightclubs as a singer and magician's assistant.

For Sharpnose, life should have been a dream, instead it was a nightmare. On a luxury holiday in Mexico, she contracted a mystery disease that led to the removal of her womb and part of her bowel and left her with a horrific and complex condition that causes so much pain it's dubbed "the suicide disease".



Maureen and her dog, Jackson

I have a strange red circle on my skin, what could it be?

This sounds like ringworm, which is caused by a fungus. It can occur anywhere on the body including the scalp. It is generally a ring-shaped, red rash with a circle of clear skin in the middle. You can also get hair loss if it is on the scalp. A pharmacist can give you an antifungal cream to treat ringworm on the skin but you'd need a prescription if it's on the scalp or you have a weakened immune system. You can get it by close contact with an infected person or animal, so check pets regularly for it.

What prevents in-grown hairs?

Shaving, waxing, plucking and threading can all cause ingrown hairs. They appear as small, red, raised bumps and can be painful, hot and swollen if they become infected. Use shaving gel, shave in the direction the hairs are growing and rinse your razor as you go. You can also use hair removal creams. Laser treatment is effective because it destroys the hair follicle right at the root.

The Doc Replies

The Sunday Post, Speirs View, 50 High Craighall Road, Glasgow G4 9UD or email us at doc@sundaypost.com

full-body, multi-site, multi-system, Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS).

She tells P.S.: "I contracted a serious infection on holiday in Mexico. I was 30. Despite medical interventions, my body struggled to recover fully and progressive neurological symptoms, excruciating muscle spasms and severe nerve and bone pain became my constant companion. While I did all I could to continue to make the very most of life, and enjoyed raising a family, I became too ill to work in 1998. In the last 35 years I have never woken up to a day free of central and autonomic nervous system dysfunction, and intractable nerve and bone pain."

Matters came to a head in a "life-defining moment in 2002". She remembers: "The horror of a lifetime ahead of pain and illness hit me. It was a bleak November morning and I suddenly realised that, while I was physically alive and breathing, on the inside, I felt numb and dead."

"I lived my life in the four walls of my front room. I had carers who would come in to help me get showered and dressed but I was then dumped in a chair at the side of the fireplace with a cup of milky tea and then they'd fly out the door."

"My days were spent sitting flicking the TV remote or listening to the radio and wondering if my mother would pop in to take me out in my wheelchair."

"All your friends disappear when you are no longer able to go out to work or to join in social events. And, when you are in pain all the time, and you don't have the skills and the strategies to deal with it, it can consume you. It erodes your soul

and depletes your spirit. "At 46, I hadn't fully lived. I decided enough was enough!" Her key to success was in espousing fundamental principles and strategies that would change the way she responded to and interacted with her pain; mechanisms that would allow her to work with it and enable her to live a fulfilling and engaged life.

While she says readers of her book should continue to seek medical advice, they can improve their lives if they take similar steps.

the horror of my life around'

How to cope with pain

Build a strong team around you

Develop a supportive network of people around you who believe in you, your dreams, your hopes, and your abilities and who will support your desire to embrace and live your life fully.

Be your own health advocate and guru

See your physical and mental health as being your responsibility not the responsibility of health professionals or family members. It is your body, mind, heart, soul and spirit. While it is important to be open to the knowledge, experience and advice of health specialists, ultimately, it is up to you to best understand your condition and to look after yourself well.

Stay on top of current research

Keep researching treatment options and new developments regarding your specific condition; sharing and discussing your findings with your doctors.

Befriend your body - it is not your enemy

Work with your body, not against it. Your body is part of you and not the enemy. Take quiet time regularly to ask your body: "What do you most need from me today to help you experience greater comfort or function best?" Get to know your body well and confidently act on its needs.

See yourself as a whole person

Treat yourself holistically: mind, body, spirit, soul. See that they are all elements of you and interconnected; you must treat yourself kindly and properly nourish and feed each of part of you.

Develop comfort and coping practices

Be open-minded to trying things that may help you. Whether it is listening to music, watching a film or pottering in the garden to distract yourself from pain, or visualisation, meditation, and mindfulness. Utilise the things that help you positively and beneficially and have the courage to minimise or park the rest.

Expand your world

Reach out to others and enjoy their company on the days you feel up to it; be productive and still go places and actively do things. Focus on doing what you can do and not on the limitations your illness imposes.

For more advice visit maureensharphouse.com/get-inspired/

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"According to Nice (the National Institute for Care and Health Excellence) between a third and a half of the UK

population is affected by chronic pain," she says.

"In a chronic condition where medical interventions are not having an effect, there's not much more doctors can do. I am not a doctor, but my book shares the same fundamental principles and steps that I took and that turned my life around from a very dark place in 2002."

"I decided to do all I could to live my life with more comfort, peace and joy, despite my ongoing challenges. Today, while I still live with intractable pain and ongoing health challenges, I am a soul fully alive and my spirit well. I want to help others to achieve that."

Unhackable Soul: The 30 Day Elixir For Reigniting The Light Within is published by Unhackable Press

Maggie Listens

Looking for practical advice, relationship help or emotional support? As a mum of four, gran of eight and dear friend to many, Margaret Clayton's years of experience make her the ideal person to turn to

We have to stay in hotels when visiting our family and it's too expensive. What should I do?

Dear Maggie Thirty-four years ago, I married a man in the RAF and, when he left the armed forces five years later, we settled in his home town of Inverness. We have two grown-up children.

I am an only child from Norwich, where both my parents died several years ago and where I still have aunts, uncles and cousins. We have, over the years, been a close family - or so I thought - and I have always returned to Norwich with my husband and kids for special family occasions like wedding and anniversary parties, major birthday celebrations and, more sadly, funerals.

My Norwich family rarely, if ever, come to Inverness. Since the death of my parents and the loss of my childhood home, we have stayed in hotels when we visit. None of the family has invited us to stay with them. I once asked, and it was embarrassing. A feeble excuse was offered as to why we couldn't stay. The fact is, though, that the cost of flights, car hire on arrival and accommodation is crippling.

My cousin's daughter is now having a 21st birthday party and my cousin wants us to attend. It will cost us £1,500 - the price of a much-needed summer holiday. I feel obligated but resentful. What should I do? Vera, Inverness



Maggie says

You have over the years done everything you can to keep in touch with your family and the relationship is clearly important to you as a wife and mother. It's a pity they haven't returned your commitment.

Despite their indifference, you have continued to do what you believe is the right thing and keep the family bonds strong.

Now your parents have died, it would have been a good thing if your family had taken the right attitude and shown you the respect you have shown them. Some people, however, just don't think that way and I know that must be hard to accept. So, although I know it's not what you want to hear, I suggest you have to come to terms with the fact it's highly unlikely your family ever will. I'd advise you to accept they are the ones losing out on the benefits of having a secure and positive relationship with family.

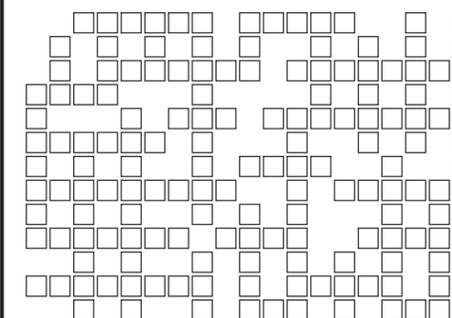
Maybe it is time to have a quiet word or calm discussion with your cousin and involve them in your thought processes regarding the extended family, particularly the heavy costs involved in the trip. Possibly by having the discussion you could both form some idea of how each other feels. Hopefully, by clearing the air a sense of family involvement will be strengthened. Once you both have understood, rather than expectations, you will be able to discuss other ways of being involved with the celebrations. You could suggest that, instead of attending, a suitable present could be agreed, or that you would love to see the cousin's daughter paying a visit to Scotland to be with you and the Scottish family as an extension of the celebrations? It is always better to discuss these things within families rather than leave so much unsaid.

Changes come about sometimes for the strangest reasons and when we least expect. So I hope for your sake your cousin has the warmth of heart to enable them to appreciate you are suffering and talk to you in a personal and supportive way for all sides of the extended family.

Are you struggling in these uncertain times? Contact Maggie for advice by emailing ps@sundaypost.com

Maggie Listens, The Sunday Post, Speirs View, 50 High Craighall Road, Glasgow G4 9UD maggielistens@sundaypost.com

QUICK THINKER



Three letters: Ash; Dye; Egg; Ink; Mar; Pal; See; Tee. Four letters: Blue; Frog; Hero; Stir; Wing. Five letters: Acute; Drown; Moses; Stint; Whizz. Six letters: Averse; Entail; Signal; Sliver; Swampy. Seven letters: Academy; Ageless; Freesia; Nurture. Eight letters: Calfskin; Informal; Mischief; Tentacle. Nine letters: Aerodrome; Displeas; Gazetteer; Sandpaper; Youngster.

SOLUTION



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