

Risk Factors in Urology: Obesity

Obesity has become very common in industrialized countries throughout the world. The prevalence of obesity is rapidly increasing and is present in nearly one third of Americans. It is anticipated that by the year 2025, at least 300 million people will be obese in the United States.

Obesity is now well recognized as a significant risk factor for numerous medical disorders and diseases. Some of these medical problems include urologic diseases such as stones and even increasing the risk of certain urologic cancers.

Risks of having urinary stones appears to increase dramatically with the presence of obesity. As with non-obese patients, the most common type of stones in obese patients are calcium oxalate stones. However, uric acid stones, which are significantly less common in non-obese patients are 4 times more common in patients with obesity.

The causes of this increased likelihood of urinary stones with obesity involves a number of factors including increased urinary excretion of uric acid, oxalate and sodium as well as a considerably more acidic urinary pH.

It has also been determined that excessive body weight is a risk factor for the development of certain types of urologic cancers. Kidney cancer has been found in increased numbers of both men and women who have obesity. The risk of kidney cancer also increases progressively with higher baseline body mass index (BMI). In addition, it has been consistently demonstrated that obesity is associated with an increased risk of prostate cancer in men. Not only are obese men more likely to develop prostate cancer but they are also more likely to be found to have the more aggressive types of prostate cancer. The aggressiveness of the prostate cancer in these obese patients results in a significantly reduced chance for cure compared to the non-obese patients with prostate cancer. These factors appear to be proportional to the degree of obesity present in these patients.

Obesity has been clearly shown to carry with it significant health hazards including urologic diseases. Patients with a diagnosis of obesity with a body mass index (BMI) greater than 30 are strongly encouraged to seek dietary and lifestyle management changes and counseling from their primary care provider.