

Preparing for National Kidney Month

As Black History month comes to a close, and national kidney month is about to begin, it's important to think about the relationship between kidney health and African Americans. Kidney disease can affect anyone regardless of age, gender or ethnicity. However, African Americans are disproportionately affected by kidney disease for a variety of reasons including genetics and socio-economics. Compared to other ethnic groups, African Americans have higher rates of diabetes and high blood pressure which are the two leading causes of kidney disease. While most patients may be aware of their diabetes or high blood pressure, many don't know these conditions can lead to chronic kidney disease, which if left untreated will eventually lead to end-stage renal disease (ESRD). According to the [USRDS 2016 annual report](#), in 2014 compared to Whites, ESRD was 3.7 times more prevalent in African Americans.

An ESRD diagnoses means you need renal replacement therapy in order to survive. This means you are either on dialysis or need a kidney transplant. Given the disproportionately large numbers of African Americans with ESRD, it is critical to spread awareness of both kidney disease and organ donation to begin to lower these statistics. In 2016, 27% of kidney transplant recipients were African American whereas 12.5% of all donors (living and deceased) were African American. While ethnicities don't need to be the same in order to receive a transplant, in many cases an African American donor would best match an African American recipient based on certain genetic markers and antibodies.

Why aren't there more African American organ donors? Researchers believe this lack of donation among the African American population stems both in distrust of the medical community and a lack of knowledge about the donation process. [A 2014 study](#) found many African Americans believed their organs would not be usable because of their pre-existing conditions, which is not the case. [The Minority Organ Tissue Transplant Education Program seeks](#) to remove these misconceptions. The MOTTEP works to mobilize grassroots support of minority organ donation in order to reduce transplant waitlist times and continue to spread awareness of the underlying issues, kidney disease.

As National Kidney Month is set to begin in a few days, take a moment to share information about kidney disease with your family, friends, and neighbors.

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