

A gift of life It's possible to live well with one kidney after donating
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Aug. 8, 2011, 8:35PM

The consequences of our nation's growing obesity crisis keep getting more, well, consequential.

Almost daily, we learn about the increased incidence of high blood pressure and Type 2 diabetes that has come as a result of our nation's out-of-control appetites for junk food. Of particular concern is the growing number of young people facing these serious medical issues.

In last Sunday's Outlook section, Houston physician Pete Etheridge outlined the dangers of yet another risk related to the three mentioned above: increased incidence of chronic kidney disease, or CKD ("Needed: Living kidney donors," Page B8, July 31).

Those consequences can be deadly serious: end-stage renal disease, or kidney failure. The choices for dealing with this are two — dialysis or kidney transplant. The costs are staggering. In 2008, \$35.3 billion of private and public monies was spent to treat more than a half million Americans. In 2009, according to Etheridge, about 400,000 were on dialysis, a process that is time-consuming and has potential health complications. The preferred alternative is kidney transplant, a widely done procedure with usually predictable and gratifying results — a return to more normal life for most recipients.

The pressing matter here appears to be getting the word out about the desperate need for more kidney donors. More than 4,000 people die each year of kidney failure because not enough donors can be found.

The way out? Persuading more healthy individuals to register for organ donation upon death, a process as simple as indicating your donor status on your driver's license. The second, and even more effective, is for healthy persons to come forward and volunteer to donate one of their two kidneys. According to Etheridge, these donations are particularly effective when made by relatives who are close matches.

And the obvious question: Does living with one kidney have an adverse effect on the donor's health?

"Donor surgery today is pretty straightforward with a short recovery time," writes Etheridge, "You can live an active, productive life and have a normal lifespan with just one kidney."

We encourage those interested in becoming kidney donors to learn more at <http://www.DonateLifeTexas.org>, the state registry.