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Nursing science

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PHY212

List the physical characteristics of urine

Key Points

Urine color is an indicator for hydration.

Urine pH is often influenced by diet.

Urine smell indicates age of the urine and may indicate the presence of glucose and ketones.

Urine turbidity may indicate urinary tract infection or obstruction.

Urinalysis is the process of analyzing and detecting chemicals excreted in urine.

Physical characteristics of urine include color, smell, pH, density and turbidity

Key Terms

urine: A liquid excrement consisting of water, salts, and urea, which is made in the kidneys then released through the urethra.

urinalysis: A urinalysis (UA), also known as Routine and Microscopy (R&M), is an array of tests performed on urine, and one of the most common methods of medical diagnosis.

Urine, a typically sterile liquid by-product of the body, is secreted by the kidneys through a process called urination and excreted through the urethra. Urine is often used as a diagnostic feature for many disease conditions. These may be based on either physical or chemical components, that may give insight to processes within the body, often through urinalysis, a common clinical analysis of urine.

Physical Characteristics

Physical characteristics that can be applied to urine include color, turbidity (transparency), smell (odor), pH (acidity – alkalinity) and density. Many of these characteristics are notable and identifiable by vision alone, but some require laboratory testing.

Color: Typically yellow-amber, but varies according to recent diet and the concentration of the urine. Drinking more water generally tends to reduce the concentration of urine, and therefore causes it to have a lighter color. Dark urine may indicate dehydration. Red urine indicates red blood cells within the urine, a sign of kidney damage and disease.

Smell: The smell of urine may provide health information. For example, urine of diabetics may have a sweet or fruity odor due to the presence of ketones (organic molecules of a particular structure) or glucose. Generally fresh urine has a mild smell but aged urine has a stronger odor similar to that of ammonia.

The pH of normal urine is generally in the range 4.6 – 8, with a typical average being around 6.0. Much of the variation occurs due to diet. For example, high protein diets result in more acidic urine, but vegetarian diets generally result in more alkaline urine

(both within the typical range of 4.6 – 8).

Density: Density is also known as “specific gravity.” This is the ratio of the weight of a volume of a substance compared with the weight of the same volume of distilled water. The density of normal urine ranges from 0.001 to 0.035.

Turbidity: The turbidity of the urine sample is gauged subjectively and reported as clear, slightly cloudy, cloudy, opaque or flocculent. Normally, fresh urine is either clear or very slightly cloudy. Excess turbidity results from the presence of suspended particles in the urine, the cause of which can usually be determined by the results of the microscopic urine sediment examination. Common causes of abnormal turbidity include: increased cells, urinary tract infections or obstructions.

Abnormalities in any of these of physical characteristics may indicate disease or metabolic imbalances. These problems may seem superficial or minor on their own, but can actually be the symptoms for more serious diseases, such as diabetes mellion.