Kidney Cancer: What You Need to Know

WHAT ARE THE KIDNEYS AND WHAT DO THEY DO?
Healthy kidneys work around the clock to clean our blood. Our kidneys are needed for life. These two bean-shaped organs are found near the middle of the back below the rib cage.

WHAT IS KIDNEY CANCER?
When cells grow out of control in the kidney, it’s called kidney cancer. Kidney cancer is fairly common. About 1 in 63 people will develop kidney cancer in their lifetime. Kidney cancer is one of the top 10 most common cancers diagnosed in the United States. There are different types of kidney cancer, they are:

• Renal cell carcinoma is the most common kidney cancer in adults.
• Transitional cell carcinoma is the second most common kidney cancer in adults.
• Wilms Tumor is a type of kidney cancer found in children.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF KIDNEY CANCER?
Kidney cancer usually does not hurt or show any signs or symptoms. Rarely, kidney cancer may show some of the following:

• Blood in the urine (Hematuria)
• Pain in the side, abdomen or back that doesn’t go away
• A lump in the abdomen
• Loss of appetite and weight loss for no known reason
• Anemia and fatigue

If kidney cancer spreads (metastasizes) beyond the kidney, symptoms will depend upon where it spreads.

Most kidney cancers are found during x-rays or blood tests that your doctor may have ordered for other reasons.
HOW IS KIDNEY CANCER TREATED?
There are many options to treat kidney cancer. The most common are:

- **Watch and Wait** (called “Active Surveillance”)
- **Renal Tumor Ablation** (destroys the tumor with heat “radiofrequency” or cold “cryoablation” energy and spare the remaining normal kidney)
- **Surgery to remove the entire kidney** (called “Radical Nephrectomy”)
- **Surgery to remove only the tumor and spare the remaining normal kidney** (called “Partial Nephrectomy”)
- **Targeted therapy** is a therapy that uses drugs that kill just kidney cancer cells
- **Immunotherapy/Biologic Therapy** that stimulates your body’s defense mechanism to specifically kill kidney cancer cells
- **Radiation** to relieve pain and symptoms
- **A clinical trial** to try a new treatment

Your doctor will base your treatment options on:

- What type of tumor you have
- Overall health
- Whether the cancer is within the kidney, has spread to nearby lymph nodes or metastasized
- If the tumor will likely grow and spread

**WHAT DO I DO NOW THAT I HAVE KIDNEY CANCER?**
It is normal to be surprised and worried after you have been diagnosed with kidney cancer. However, it is important to develop a treatment plan right away. Learn as much as you can about your disease and the different treatment options available. Specialists who can help you are:

- A **urologist**: a surgeon who specializes in treating diseases of the urinary and reproductive systems
- A **radiation oncologist**: a doctor who treats cancer with radiation therapy
- A **medical oncologist**: a doctor who treats cancer with medicines such as immunotherapy and chemotherapy

**QUESTIONS TO ASK MY HEALTH CARE PROVIDER**

- Do I have kidney cancer or something else?
- What is the stage and grade of my cancer and what does that mean?
- Has it spread anywhere else?
- Do I need other tests before we can decide on treatment?
- What are my treatment options? Which do you recommend and why?
- How long will I be hospitalized after surgery? How long before I can return to work and participate in vigorous activity after surgery?
- What are the chances that my cancer can be cured?
- What are the chances that my cancer will return after treatment?
- What risks or side effects should I expect from treatment? For how long?
- Will I need to see a nephrologist following surgery? Will I need to be on dialysis after surgery?
- Following surgery, will I need other treatments?
- What should I do to prepare for treatment? What will it be like?
- What will we do if the treatment doesn’t work?
- Can you recommend another urologist for a second opinion?
- How often will I need to have checkups after treatment?
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RESOURCES

Resources, such as the Urology Care Foundation and the Kidney Cancer Association, are devoted to patient support and education. These and other resources will help you understand how to deal with the disease from a patient perspective and how others are dealing with their kidney cancer.

National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health
http://www.cancer.gov/types/kidney

The Kidney Cancer Association
www.kidneycancer.org

The National Library of Medicine’s MedlinePlus
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/kidneycancer.html (English)

Urology Care Foundation
UrologyHealth.org

• You may find more information about Kidney Cancer at www.urologyhealth.org/urologic-conditions/kidney-cancer

For more information, contact:

Urology Care Foundation
1000 Corporate Blvd.
Linthicum, MD 21090
1-800-828-7866

UrologyHealth.org

You may download and print this fact sheet yourself from UrologyHealth.org/KCFS. For copies of printed materials about kidney cancer and other urologic conditions, visit UrologyHealth.org/Order or call 800-828-7866.

Patient resources provided through the generous support of:

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