



After a Kidney Cancer Diagnosis



The kidneys are 2 organs behind the upper back wall of your abdomen (belly). Kidneys remove waste from other organs to make urine that leaves the body when you urinate (pee). Kidney cancer is also called renal cancer. If you have been told you have kidney or renal cancer, you've probably already had scans and x-rays, blood and urine tests, and a biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain proteins and gene changes called biomarkers. You might also have other procedures to find out if the cancer has spread. These tests help your doctor know what type of kidney cancer you have, what stage it is, and what treatment might help.

Treatment for kidney cancer

Your treatment options will also depend on the results of tests on the cancer cells, your health, and your personal preferences. Some small, slow growing kidney cancers don't need to be treated right away. In this case, doctors might watch and wait to see if the tumor grows before giving treatment.

Surgery is used to treat most kidney cancers. It might be the only treatment needed, especially if the cancer is in just one of your kidneys and has not spread to other parts of your body. Surgery to remove part or all of a kidney is called a nephrectomy.

Other treatment can include ablation, radiation, and medicines such as chemo, targeted drug therapy, or immunotherapy. In many cases, more than one type of treatment is needed. Your treatment will depend on the type and stage of your kidney cancer and where it is located. Your doctor will help you decide which treatments are best for you.

Be sure to ask:

- What is the goal of treatment?
- What type of kidney cancer do I have?
- Is the cancer in one kidney or both?
- What stage is my kidney cancer, and what does that mean?
- What else have you learned from my test results?
- Will I need more tests?
- Will I need surgery? Can the tumor be removed?
- Do I need one or both of my kidneys removed?

What to expect before and during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need radiation therapy, you will work with a radiation oncologist. They will tell you what to expect before, during, and after radiation treatment. If you need other types of treatment, your cancer care team will explain how it is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you're doing, and help you manage any side effects. You might also get blood tests, scans, or other tests at certain times to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for kidney cancer has the same side effects. For example, the side effects of having a kidney removed are different from the side effects of chemo, targeted drug therapy, immunotherapy, or radiation treatments. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects.

Be sure to ask:

- What are my treatment options? What do you think is best for me and why?
- Are there any clinical trials for my type of cancer?
- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment? How long will it last?
- Where will I go to get treatment? Can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work and exercise?

What to expect after treatment

After treatment, ask your cancer doctor for a treatment summary and follow-up plan. This is called a survivorship care plan. Your cancer doctor will work with your family or primary care doctor to help manage side effects from treatment and check your general health. You will have regular tests to check if your cancer has come back or if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

Be sure to tell your doctor or someone on the cancer care team if any treatment side effects don't go away or if you have any new symptoms.

You might be faced with changes to your body after treatment. Surgery and other treatments may change how your kidneys function, which could impact your body in different ways. Be sure to ask the doctor what to expect and let them know if you have any problems.

People who have had kidney cancer are at risk of having it again, getting cancer in the other kidney, or getting certain other types of cancer. Even if you feel fine after finishing treatment, it's important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule for follow-up tests to check if your kidney cancer has come back.

For some people, the cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

Be sure to ask:

- Where do I get a copy of my treatment summary and follow-up plan?
- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- When and how should I contact them?
- Will I need tests to see if my cancer has come back, or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a mammogram or colonoscopy, to find other cancers early?
- Are there late or long-term side effects from treatment that I should watch for?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?



For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/kidneycancer or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.



Staying healthy

There are things you can do to keep yourself healthy during and after treatment. Not smoking may help reduce your chances of kidney cancer. Checking and controlling your blood pressure is important, too. Getting to and staying at a healthy weight, eating well, being active, and avoiding alcohol can also help you stay healthy and lower your risk of getting a new kidney cancer or other cancers.

Dealing with your feelings

Having kidney cancer might make you feel scared, sad, or nervous. It's normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about them, no matter what they are.
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.
- If your doctor says it's OK, continue doing things you enjoy like spending time outdoors, going to a movie or sporting event, or going out to dinner.
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning.

You might want to reach out to friends, family, or religious leaders or groups. Counseling can also help. Some people find it helpful to talk with others who've been through the same things. A support group can offer that. Tell your cancer care team how you're feeling. They can help you find the right support.

