

## Kidney Cancer

### ■ What is kidney cancer?

Kidney cancer begins when healthy cells in 1 or both kidneys change and grow out of control, forming a mass called a tumor. There are several types of cancer that can occur in the kidney, but renal cell carcinoma is the most common.

There are also several types of kidney cancer cells. The most common type is called clear cell. Knowing which type of cell makes up a kidney tumor helps doctors develop a treatment plan.

### ■ What is the function of the kidneys?

The kidneys are reddish-brown, bean-shaped organs located above the waist on both sides of the spine. They filter blood and remove impurities, excess minerals and salts, and extra water to produce urine. These organs also produce hormones that help control blood pressure, red blood cell production, and other functions. Because each kidney works independently, 1 kidney can be removed without affecting the function of the other.

### ■ What does stage mean?

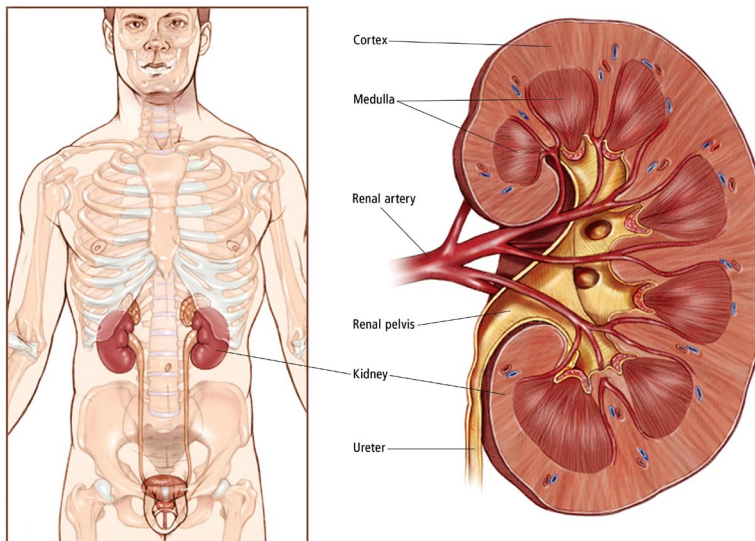
The stage is a way of describing where the cancer is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body. There are 4 stages for kidney cancer: stages I through IV (1 through 4). Find more information at [www.cancer.net/kidney](http://www.cancer.net/kidney).

### ■ How is kidney cancer treated?

The treatment of kidney cancer depends on the type and stage of the cancer, whether the cancer has spread, and the person's overall health. Kidney cancer is most often treated with surgery, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, or a combination of these treatments. In some situations, especially when the tumor is small and the person has other medical conditions, the doctor may recommend active surveillance. During active surveillance, the tumor is closely watched and treatment only starts if the disease shows signs of getting worse. If the cancer has not spread beyond the kidneys, surgery to remove the tumor, part or all of the kidney, and possibly nearby tissue and lymph nodes may be the only treatment needed. Radiation therapy is sometimes used if the cancer has spread somewhere else, such as the brain or a bone. It is used to treat the cancer and/or relieve pain. People with kidney cancer that has spread to other parts of the body are most often treated with targeted therapy and/or immunotherapy. When making treatment decisions, people may also consider a clinical trial. Clinical trials are an option to consider for treatment and care for all stages of cancer. Talk with your doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of kidney cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team. This is called palliative care or supportive care and is an important part of the overall treatment plan.

### ■ How can I cope with kidney cancer?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your health care team are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, organizing your health information, making sure all of your questions are answered, and participating in the decision-making process are other steps. Talk with your health care team about any concerns. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.



# Questions to ask the health care team

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. It can be helpful to bring someone along to your appointments to take notes. Consider asking your health care team the following questions:

- ▶ What type of kidney cancer do I have? What type of cell makes up the tumor?
- ▶ Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- ▶ What stage is the kidney cancer? What does this mean?
- ▶ Would you explain my treatment options?
- ▶ What clinical trials are available for me? Where are they located, and how can I find out more about them?
- ▶ What treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- ▶ What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to eliminate the cancer, help me feel better, or both?
- ▶ Who will be part of my treatment team, and what does each member do?
- ▶ How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- ▶ Will this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
- ▶ What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- ▶ If I'm worried about managing the costs of cancer care, who can help me?
- ▶ Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- ▶ If I have a question or problem, who should I call?

**Find more questions to ask the health care team at [www.cancer.net/kidney](http://www.cancer.net/kidney).  
For a digital list of questions, download Cancer.Net's free mobile app at [www.cancer.net/app](http://www.cancer.net/app).**

## Words to know

**Biopsy:** Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells.

**Immunotherapy:** Treatment that uses the immune system to fight cancer.

**Lymph node:** A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection.

**Metastasis:** The spread of cancer from where it began to another part of the body.

**Nephrectomy:** Surgery to remove part or all of a kidney.

**Oncologist:** A doctor who specializes in treating cancer.

**Prognosis:** Chance of recovery.

**Radiation therapy:** The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells.

**Targeted therapy:** Treatment that targets specific genes or proteins that contribute to cancer growth.

**Tumor:** An abnormal growth of body tissue.

**Urologic oncologist:** A doctor who specializes in treating cancers of the urinary tract.

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