

Bitesize Guide to:

Kidney Cancer

There has been a rise in the number of people diagnosed with kidney cancer. It is potentially a life-threatening disease, but if caught early, it can be treated. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the symptoms of kidney cancer. This is our bitesize guide to the condition.

What is it?

Kidney cancer is a disease in which cells in the kidney grow and multiply in an abnormal, uncontrollable way. These cells can form a lump, or tumour, which can damage the kidney. There are several different types of kidney cancer, the most common of which is renal cell cancer (RCC).

Who gets it?

It is most common among people who are over the age of 60. More men are diagnosed with kidney cancer than women.

Why does it happen?

It is unclear what causes cells in the body to become cancerous. However, several factors are thought to increase the risk of developing kidney cancer. These include:

- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- High blood pressure
- Being overweight
- Genetics and family history
- Having kidney dialysis

Diagnosing Kidney Cancer

If you experience any of the following symptoms, you need to consult your GP as soon as possible:

- Blood in urine
- Pain in your back or side
- Feeling feverish

Your doctor will ask you about your symptoms, give a physical examination, and take a urine test. If your GP thinks there is a chance of kidney cancer, they will refer you to a hospital specialist for further tests. You may have one or more of the following tests to check for kidney cancer and to assess how far it has spread:

- Blood test

- X-ray of your chest and bones, CT (Computerised Tomography) or MRI (Magnetic Resonance Imaging) scan
- Biopsy - a sample of tissue is taken from your kidney and tested for cancer in the lab

Treating Kidney Cancer

Your treatment options will depend on the type of cancer and how far it has spread. If the cancer has not spread beyond the kidneys, you will most likely have surgery to remove part of or the entire afflicted kidney. If you are unable to have surgery, there are other treatments available, including:

- Radiotherapy - targeted x-rays are used to kill cancerous cells
- Biological and hormone therapy - medication is given to reduce tumour size
- Freezing therapy (cryotherapy) - cancer cells are frozen and killed
- Radio wave treatment (RFA) - the heat produced by radio waves is used to kill the cancer cells
- Embolisation - the blood supply to the tumour is blocked off, causing the tumour to wither and die
- Chemotherapy - using medication to kill the cancer cells

4 Key Facts about Kidney Cancer

1. A smoker is up to two times more likely to develop kidney cancer compared to a non-smoker.
2. Other symptoms to look out for include weight loss, loss of appetite, and feeling a lump or swelling in the area over your kidney.
3. Surgery is the most common treatment.
4. The treatment recommended to you will depend on a number of things, such as the stage of the cancer, how likely it is to spread and your general health and age.

If you think you may have kidney cancer, speak to your GP.

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We want to make sure that our information is helpful to you and value feedback. To let us know your views or to find out the latest from The Urology Foundation visit www.theurologyfoundation.org

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