

# Kidney Cancer: Treatment Discharge Instructions



When you're being treated for kidney cancer, you'll need to take good care of yourself at home after treatment. The tips below will help you care for yourself after surgery, chemotherapy (chemo), immunotherapy, targeted therapy, or radiation.

It's important to talk with your healthcare providers about what symptoms to watch for and when to call them. For instance, chemo can make you more likely to get infections. You may be told to check your temperature and stay away from people who are sick. You may need to call if you have a fever or chills. Make sure you know what number to call with questions. Is there a different number for evenings and weekends?

It's also important to know which medicines you're taking. Write down the names of your medicines. Ask your healthcare team how each one works, how much to take, how to take it, when to take it, what it's supposed to do, and what side effects it might cause.

## Home care after surgery

Here's what to do at home after surgery for kidney cancer:

- Take your medicines exactly as directed. Use your pain medicine as needed so you can be up and moving around. Don't stay in bed.
- Do the coughing and deep breathing exercises you learned in the hospital.
- Shower as desired. Ask a friend or family member to stay close by in case you need help. Don't use a bathtub or hot tub or swim until your healthcare provider says it's OK.
- Keep your cut (incision) clean and dry. Cover it with a dry, clean bandage as directed. Wash your incision gently with mild soap and warm water. Pat it dry. Don't scrub it. Follow your surgeon's instructions on how to change the dressing. Before changing your bandage, wash your hands with soap and clean, running (warm or cold) water.
- Check your temperature every day for a week after your surgery.
- Don't worry if you feel more tired than normal. Feeling tired and weak are common for a few weeks after surgery. Listen to your body. If an activity causes pain, stop.
- Limit your activity to short walks. Plan rest breaks so you don't have shortness of breath. Slowly increase your activity as you feel able.
- Don't do any strenuous activities. This includes mowing the lawn, using a vacuum cleaner, or playing sports.
- Don't lift anything heavier than 10 pounds for 4 weeks.
- Don't drive until you are free of pain and no longer taking prescription pain medicine. This may take 2 to 4 weeks.
- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet.
- Take steps to prevent constipation. Eat fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day unless your healthcare provider tells you to limit fluids. Use a laxative or a mild stool softener if your healthcare provider says it's OK.

## Home care after chemotherapy, immunotherapy, or targeted therapy

After chemotherapy, immunotherapy, or targeted therapy, you'll need to prevent and ease mouth sores, eat well, and try to stay germ-free. Here's what to do at home after chemo for kidney cancer:

- Brush your teeth with a soft-bristle toothbrush after every meal and at bedtime.
- Don't use dental floss if your platelet count is low. Your healthcare provider or nurse will tell you if this is the case.
- Use an oral swab or special soft toothbrush if your gums bleed during regular brushing.
- Don't use alcohol-based mouthwashes. (They may cause pain if your mouth is irritated or has sores.)
- Use salt and baking soda to clean your mouth. Mix 1 teaspoon of salt and 1 teaspoon of baking soda into an 8-ounce glass of warm water. Swish and spit as often as you like to keep your mouth moist and clean.
- Let your healthcare provider know if your throat is sore.
- Check your mouth and tongue for white patches. This may be a sign of a fungal or yeast infection. This is a common side effect of chemo. Tell your provider about these patches. You may need medicine to help you fight a fungal infection.
- Try to exercise. Exercise keeps you strong and keeps your heart and lungs active. Walk as much as you feel able.
- Get plenty of rest. Tell your team if you're having trouble sleeping.
- Use anti-nausea medicines as needed. Don't wait until you start vomiting.
- Follow the diet your provider talked to you about. For instance, tips may include:
  - Choose bland foods with little taste or smell if you are reacting strongly to food.
  - Eat small meals several times a day.
  - Be sure to cook all food thoroughly. This kills bacteria and helps prevent infection.
  - Eat foods that are cool and soft. They are less likely to cause mouth, throat, and stomach irritation.
  - Stock up on easy-to-make foods.
  - Eat foods high in protein and calories.
  - Drink plenty of water and other fluids, unless directed otherwise by your provider.
  - Ask your provider before taking any vitamins, herbs, or other supplements.
- Keep your skin clean. During treatment your body can't fight germs very well.
  - Take short baths or showers with warm water. Don't use very hot or cold water.
  - Use moisturizing soap. Treatment can make your skin dry.
  - Use lotion and lip balm a few times a day to help ease dry skin.
  - Tell your provider about skin rashes or wounds that don't heal. Treatment may be needed to help prevent infection.

## Home care after radiation therapy

After radiation therapy, you'll need to take extra care of your skin in the area that's treated. Here's what to do at home after radiation therapy for kidney cancer:

- Don't scrub or use soap on the treated area of your skin.
- Ask your healthcare team which lotion to use.

- Keep the treated area out of the sun. Ask your healthcare team if you can use a sunscreen.
- Don't remove ink marks unless your radiation therapist says it's OK. Don't scrub or use soap on the marks when you wash. Let water run over them and pat them dry.
- Protect your skin from heat or cold. Don't use hot tubs, saunas, heating pads, or ice packs.
- Wear soft, loose clothing to prevent rubbing your skin.
- Don't be surprised if your treatment causes skin color changes, burns, or blisters. Ask your team what to do and how to protect your skin.
- Be prepared for nausea and vomiting. Make sure you have medicines to treat nausea right away.
- Watch for changes in your bowel movements. Let your team know about diarrhea or constipation.

## When to call your healthcare provider

During your treatment period, call your healthcare team right away if you have any of these:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your healthcare provider
- Chills
- Signs of infection around an incision (redness, drainage, warmth, pain)
- Incision opens up or pulls apart
- Unusual bleeding or bruising
- Shortness of breath, especially at rest
- Pain that gets worse or isn't controlled with your pain medicines
- Less urine
- Blood in your urine
- Cloudy or bad-smelling urine
- Pain or burning when you pass urine
- Fast, irregular heartbeat
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Always feeling cold
- New redness, pain, swelling, or warmth in your leg or arm
- Chest pain
- Ongoing nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea
- Headaches or vision changes

Ask about all side effects or problems you should watch for. Ask what you should do if they happen.

You can often do things to control or even prevent treatment side effects. Most of them get better over time as you heal and recover.

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