

Kidney Cancer: Risk Factors



What is a risk factor?

A risk factor is anything that may increase your chance of having a disease. Risk factors for a certain type of cancer might include smoking, diet, family history, or many other things. The exact cause of someone's cancer may not be known. But risk factors can make it more likely for a person to have cancer.

Things you should know about risk factors for cancer:

- Risk factors can increase a person's risk, but they don't always cause the disease.
- Some people with one or more risk factors never develop cancer. Other people with cancer have no known risk factors.
- Some risk factors are very well known. But there's ongoing research about risk factors for many kinds of cancer.

Some risk factors, such as family history, may not be in your control. But others may be things you can change. Knowing the risk factors can help you make choices that might help lower your risk. For instance, if an unhealthy diet is a risk factor, you may choose to eat healthy foods. If excess weight is a risk factor, your healthcare provider may help you lose weight.

Who is at risk for kidney cancer?

Risk factors for kidney cancer include:

- **Age.** Most people with kidney cancer are age 55 and older. The risk increases with age, but this cancer can happen at any age. It can also affect children and young adults.
- **Gender.** Men are more likely than women to develop kidney cancer. This may be because men are more likely to smoke and work with cancer-causing chemicals.
- **Race.** African Americans are at a slightly higher risk for kidney cancer.
- **Smoking.** The longer you've smoked, the greater your chance of having renal cell carcinoma (RCC), the type of kidney cancer that is most common.
- **Obesity.** People who are very overweight are more likely to get kidney cancer than those at a healthy weight. Hormone changes caused by obesity can lead to RCC.
- **Medicines.** Kidney cancer may be linked to using certain medicines for a long time, such as over-the-counter pain medicines, like acetaminophen, aspirin, and ibuprofen.
- **Contact with chemicals.** Contact with certain substances puts you at higher risk for kidney cancer. This includes chemicals and substances like the metal cadmium (in batteries, paint, and welding materials), herbicides, and organic solvents, especially trichloroethylene.
- **High blood pressure.** People with high blood pressure have a higher risk for kidney cancer. It's not known if the risk is because of the condition, the medicines used to treat it, or both.
- **Advanced or chronic kidney disease.** This puts you at a higher risk for kidney cancer. People getting dialysis might be at an even higher risk.
- **Certain inherited conditions (hereditary renal cell carcinoma).** Certain syndromes linked to genes passed in families affect your kidney cancer risk. For instance, people who have von Hippel-Lindau disease are at high risk for kidney cancer, specifically clear cell RCC. Some other conditions linked to kidney cancer include Birt-Hogg-Dube syndrome, hereditary papillary renal cell carcinoma, Cowden

syndrome, and hereditary leiomyomatosis and renal cell carcinoma. Inherited kidney cancer associated with a single, inherited gene is uncommon. It accounts for no more than 1 in 20 kidney cancers.

- **Family history of kidney cancer.** People with a family history of kidney cancer have a higher chance of developing the disease. This risk is highest if your brothers or sisters have kidney cancer.

What are your risk factors?

Talk with your healthcare provider about your risk factors for kidney cancer. If you have a family history of kidney cancer or other conditions linked with the disease, you may want to ask about genetic testing and kidney cancer screening. (Screening means looking for cancer in people who don't have symptoms.)

If genetic tests show a risk for kidney cancer, your healthcare provider may advise you get screened often for kidney cancer. There are no standard guidelines for how often you should be screened or what tests to use if you are at increased risk. Your healthcare provider will advise a screening schedule based on your overall health and risk factors.

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