

# Kidney Cancer: Treatment Choices



There are various treatment choices for kidney cancer. Which one may work best for you? It depends on a number of factors. These include the type, size, location, and stage of your cancer. Factors also include your age, overall health, and the side effects you'll find acceptable.

## Learning about your treatment options

You may have questions and concerns about your treatment options. You may also want to know how you'll feel and function after treatment. You may wonder if you'll have to change your normal activities.

Your oncologist, or cancer specialist, is the best person to answer your questions. They can tell you what your treatment choices are, how successful they're expected to be, and what the risks and side effects are. They may advise a specific treatment. Or they may offer more than 1 and ask you to decide which you'd prefer to use. It can be hard to make this decision. It is important to take the time you need to make the best decision.

Deciding on the best plan may take some time. Talk with your cancer specialist about how much time you can take to explore your options. You may want to get another opinion before deciding on your treatment plan. In fact, some insurance companies may require a second opinion. In addition, you may want to include your family and friends in this process.

## Understanding the goals of treatment for kidney cancer

Treatment may control or cure the kidney cancer. It can also improve your quality of life by helping to control the symptoms of the disease. The goal of kidney cancer treatment is to do 1 or more of these things:

- Remove the primary kidney cancer tumor or other tumors
- Kill or stop the growth or spread of kidney cancer cells
- Prevent or delay the cancer's return
- Ease symptoms of the cancer, such as pain or pressure on organs

## Types of treatment for kidney cancer

Treatment options include:

- **Surgery.** Surgery to remove the kidney is called a nephrectomy. Surgery is used to remove part or all of the kidney with the tumor and any nearby lymph nodes that contain cancer. You may also have surgery to ease pressure or pain. The remaining kidney is often able to do the work of both kidneys.
- **Immunotherapy.** This type of systemic therapy helps your immune system find and fight the cancer.
- **Radiation therapy.** This treatment kills cancer cells with high-energy radiation from X-rays or other particles, or sources. Radiation therapy is most often used when the kidney cancer has spread to certain bones or the brain. It may be used to treat symptoms such as cough or pain.
- **Chemotherapy (chemo).** This systemic treatment uses 1 or more medicines to kill cancer cells or shrink tumors. Chemo focuses on attacking rapidly growing cells. Regular chemotherapy medicines are not often used or very effective against kidney cancer.
- **Targeted therapy.** These are medicines that target specific parts of kidney cancer cells to kill them or slow their growth. These medicines work differently from chemo medicines. They're often used to treat advanced kidney cancer.

- **Ablation therapy.** There are 2 main types of ablation therapy used to treat kidney cancer that use either heat or cold to kill cancer cells. They're both done by putting a special needle into an area of cancer cells. This is a less invasive treatment that causes less bleeding. It also keeps the side effects to a small area of the body. Radiofrequency ablation (RFA) uses high-energy radio waves to kill cancer cells by heat. Cryoablation (also called cryotherapy or cryosurgery) uses extreme cold to kill cancer cells.
- **Supportive care.** Your cancer specialist may advise therapies that help ease your symptoms but don't treat the cancer. They may suggest supportive care if available treatments are more likely to do you more harm than good.

Your cancer specialist may suggest that you have more than 1 of these types of treatment. This is sometimes called combination therapy. Newer types of treatment may be available only through a research study. This is called a clinical trial. Talk with your cancer specialist about what clinical trials may be an option for you.

© 2000-2027 The StayWell Company, LLC. All rights reserved. This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions  
This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your Healthcare professional's instructions. Copyright Krames LLC.