



# Kidney Cancer

## What You Should Know

*Urology Care*  
FOUNDATION™

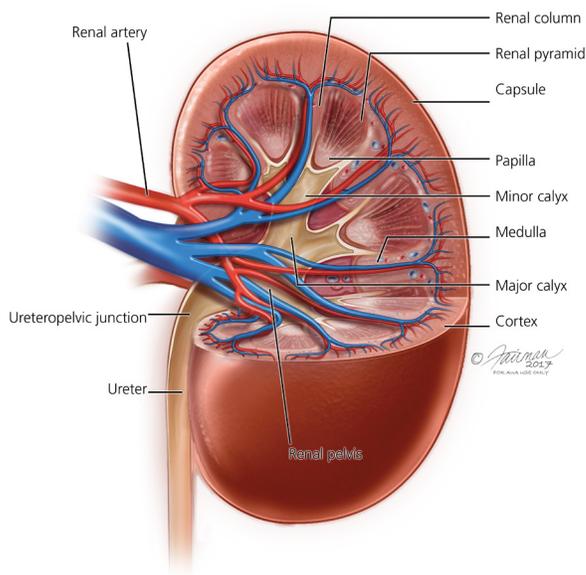
*The Official Foundation of the  
American Urological Association*

### What Do Kidneys Do?

The kidneys are two bean-shaped organs that sit near the middle of the back below the rib cage. Our kidneys serve many purposes, but they mainly do the following:

- Clean our blood
- Balance fluids
- Remove waste as urine
- Keep the body's essential chemicals and electrolytes in balance
- Make hormones to keep our blood pressure stable, make red blood cells and keep our bones strong

### Healthy Kidney



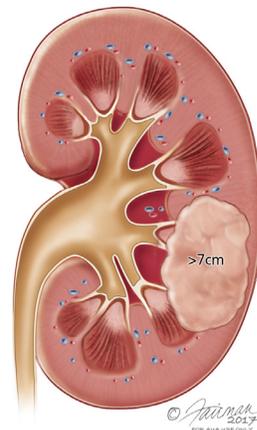
### What is Kidney Cancer?

A kidney mass, or tumor, is an abnormal growth in the kidney. Some kidney masses are benign (not cancerous) and some are malignant (cancerous). One in four kidney masses less than 4 cm are benign. Smaller masses are more likely to be benign, whereas larger masses are more likely to be cancerous.

There are many different kinds of kidney tumors. The most common ones are:

- **Renal Cell Carcinoma (RCC):** These are the most common malignant kidney tumors and are found in the lining of the small tubes in the kidney.
- **Benign Kidney Tumors:** These can grow quite large but they are almost always non-cancerous and do not spread to other organs.
- **Wilms Tumor:** Wilms tumors almost always occur in children and are rarely found in adults.

### Kidney with Tumor



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### What Causes Kidney Cancer?

No one thing causes kidney cancer. But, there are a number of things that can increase your risk for kidney tumors such as:

- Smoking
- Obesity, poor diet
- Family history of high blood pressure
- Being on kidney dialysis
- Workplace exposure to chlorinated chemicals
- Heredity

More men than women are diagnosed with kidney cancer. Kidney cancer is more common in African-American, Native American, and Alaskan Native people. You can get kidney cancer at any age but it is more common in older people (those greater than 75 years old). The earlier stage that kidney cancer is diagnosed—the better your chances of survival.

### What are the Symptoms of Kidney Cancer?

Most kidney masses have no symptoms in the early stages. If there are symptoms, they will most likely be:

- Hematuria (blood in urine)
- Flank pain between the ribs and hips
- Low back pain on one side (not caused by injury) and that does not go away
- Loss of appetite and weight loss for no known reason
- Fever that is not caused by an infection and does not go away
- Anemia (low red blood cell count)

### How is Kidney Cancer Treated?

The goal of kidney cancer treatment is to protect the working of the kidney as much as possible. Your doctor may suggest one of these ways to treat the tumor:

- Active surveillance, or watch and wait
- Thermal ablation to kill the cells with extreme cold or heat
- Partial nephrectomy to remove part of the kidney
- Radical nephrectomy to remove the whole kidney

### Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What kind of kidney cancer do I have?
- Has the cancer spread? If so, how far?
- What treatment do you suggest and why?
- Will I be cured after treatment?
- What are the chances the mass will return after treatment?
- What risks or side effects should I expect from treatment?

### About Urology Care Foundation

The Urology Care Foundation is the world's leading urologic Foundation—and the official Foundation of the American Urological Association. We provide information for those actively managing their urologic health and those ready to make healthy changes in their lives. Our information is based on the American Urological Association resources and is reviewed by medical experts.

To learn more about different urologic issues visit **[UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions](https://UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions)**. Go to **[UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist](https://UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist)** to find a doctor near you.

### Disclaimer

This information is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for professional medical advice. It is not to be used or relied on for that purpose. Please talk to your urologist or health care provider about your health concerns. Always consult a health care provider before you start or stop any treatments, including medications.

For more information about other urologic conditions, visit **[UrologyHealth.org/Download](https://UrologyHealth.org/Download)** or call 800-828-7866.

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