



## Kidney Cancer

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# Kidney Cancer

Cancer of the kidneys, also known as **renal cancer**, can be cured if detected early. However, symptoms may not occur until the tumor has become large or **metastasized** (spread to other organs), when it is difficult to treat. The majority of kidney cancers are **renal cell carcinomas**, also known as **renal adenocarcinomas** or **clear cell carcinomas**. Most kidney cancers affect adults between 50 and 70 years of age. The most common type of kidney cancer in children is called **Wilms tumor**. The July 7, 2004, issue of *JAMA* includes an article about renal cancer.

## RISK FACTORS FOR KIDNEY CANCER

- Kidney cancers most commonly occur in adults older than 50 years.
- Men are twice as likely to have renal cancers as women are.
- Cigarette smoking increases the risk of developing renal cell cancer.
- Environmental and occupational exposures to asbestos, cadmium, and organic solvents increase the risk of developing kidney cancer.
- Obesity and eating a high-fat diet have been linked with as many as 20% of kidney cancers.
- **von Hippel-Lindau** disease is a genetic condition that has a high incidence of kidney cancer.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- **Hematuria** (blood in the urine)
- Abdominal or low back pain unrelated to injury
- Unintentional weight loss
- Fatigue
- **Anemia** (low red blood cell count)
- Fever
- High blood pressure
- Leg or ankle swelling

## TESTING FOR KIDNEY CANCER

Diagnosis of renal cancer may involve several kinds of tests. In addition to a detailed medical history, physical examination, and laboratory blood testing, tests may include a computed tomography (CT) scan, ultrasound, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), or **intravenous pyelography** (a dye and x-ray test of the kidneys). Chest x-ray and bone scan may be used to detect metastatic disease. **Arteriography**, a technique that uses dye in the blood vessels feeding the kidney, may define the extent of the tumor or help plan surgical treatment.

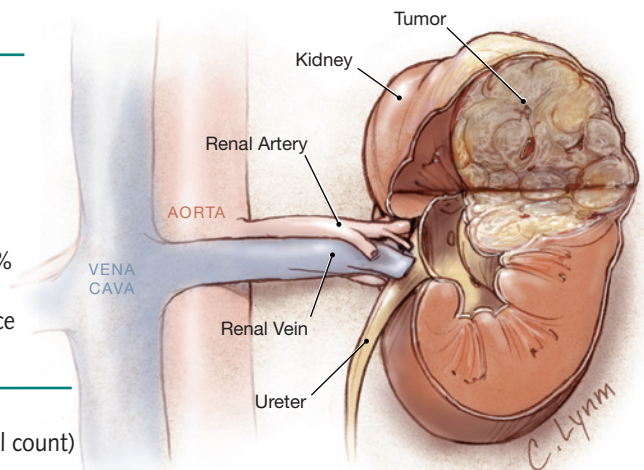
## TREATMENT

Surgical removal of the kidney (**nephrectomy**) and surrounding tissue may cure kidney cancer in persons whose tumor is confined to the kidney. **Radiation therapy** (high-energy x-ray treatments) may be offered to patients to treat pain and advanced or metastatic kidney cancers or to help shrink a tumor that is causing obstruction. **Immunotherapy** helps to boost the body's own immune system to fight the cancer. **Interferon** and **interleukin 2** boost the immune system and may be used to treat patients with advanced kidney cancer. Patients who volunteer for **clinical trials** (medical research studies) may be offered immunotherapy in combination with experimental treatments.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Cancer Society  
800/227-2345  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)
- National Cancer Institute  
800/4-CANCER  
[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA's Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). Many are available in English and Spanish. A Patient Page on preventing cancer was published in the May 26, 2004, issue; and one on cancer clinical trials was published in the June 9, 2004, issue.

Sources: American Cancer Society, National Cancer Institute

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