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After Kidney Cancer Treatment

Living as a Cancer Survivor

For many people, cancer treatment often raises questions about next steps as a survivor.

- [Living as a Kidney Cancer Survivor](#)

Living as a Kidney Cancer Survivor

For some people with kidney cancer, treatment can remove or destroy the cancer. Completing treatment can be both stressful and exciting. You may be relieved to finish treatment, yet it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back. This is very common if you've had cancer.

For other people, the kidney cancer might never go away completely. Some people may get regular treatment with chemotherapy or targeted therapy or other treatments to try and help keep the cancer in check. Learning to live with [cancer that does not go away](#)¹ can be difficult and very stressful.

Follow-up care

If you have completed treatment, your doctors will still want to watch you closely. It's very important to go to all your follow-up appointments. During these visits, your doctors will ask if you are having any problems and may order [exams and lab tests](#)² or [imaging](#)

[tests](#)³ to look for signs of cancer or treatment side effects.

Almost any cancer treatment can have side effects. Some might only last for a few days or weeks, but others might last a long time. Some side effects might not even show up until years after you have finished treatment. Your doctor visits are a good time to ask questions and talk about any changes or problems you notice or concerns you have.

It's very important to let your doctor know about any new symptoms or problems, because they could be caused by the cancer coming back or by a new disease or a second cancer.

Doctor visits

To some extent, the frequency of follow up visits and tests will depend on the [stage](#)⁴ of your cancer, the [treatment](#)⁵ you received, and the chance of it coming back.

In people with early-stage cancer, many doctors recommend follow-up visits (which may include imaging tests and blood tests) with a physical exam every 12 months for the first couple of years after treatment. For people who were treated for later stage cancers, follow-up visits with imaging and lab tests most likely will be every 3-6 months for the first 3 years and then once a year. Some doctors may advise different follow-up schedules.

Survivors of kidney cancer should also follow the [American Cancer Society Guidelines for the Early Detection of Cancer](#)⁶, such as those for breast, cervical, colorectal, and prostate cancer.

Ask your doctor for a survivorship care plan

Talk with your doctor about developing a [survivorship care plan](#)⁷ for you. This plan might include:

- A suggested schedule for follow-up exams and tests
- A schedule for other tests you might need to look for long-term health effects from your cancer or its treatment
- A list of possible late- or long-term side effects from your treatment, including what to watch for and when you should contact your doctor
- Suggestions for things you can do that might improve your health, including possibly lowering your chances of the cancer coming back
- Reminders to keep your appointments with your primary care provider (PCP), who

will monitor your general health care

Keeping health insurance and copies of your medical records

Even after treatment, it's very important to keep health insurance. Tests and doctor visits cost a lot, and even though no one wants to think of their cancer coming back, this could happen.

At some point after your cancer treatment, you might find yourself seeing a new doctor who doesn't know about your medical history. It's important to [keep copies of your medical records](#)⁸ to give your new doctor the details of your diagnosis and treatment.

Can I lower my risk of kidney cancer progressing or coming back?

If you have (or have had) kidney cancer, you probably want to know if there are things you can do that might lower your risk of the cancer growing or coming back, such as exercising, eating a certain type of diet, or taking nutritional supplements. At this time, it's not yet clear if those things will help.

It is known that smoking is linked to an increased risk of kidney cancer. While it's not clear if smoking can affect kidney cancer growth or recurrence, it is still helpful to stop smoking to decrease your risk of getting another [smoking-related cancer](#)⁹. Not smoking can also help you tolerate chemotherapy and radiation better. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor or call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345.

At this time, not enough is known about kidney cancer to say for sure if there are things you can do that will be helpful. Adopting healthy behaviors such as, eating well, getting regular physical activity, and staying at a healthy weight may help, but no one knows for sure. Still, we do know that these types of changes can have positive effects on your health that can extend beyond your risk of kidney cancer or other cancers.

About dietary supplements

So far, no dietary supplements (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of kidney cancer progressing or coming back. This doesn't mean that no supplements will help, but it's important to know that none have been proven to do so.

Dietary supplements are not regulated like medicines in the United States – they do not

have to be proven effective (or even safe) before being sold, although there are limits on what they're allowed to claim they can do. If you're thinking about taking any type of nutritional supplement, talk to your health care team. They can help you decide which ones you can use safely while avoiding those that might be harmful.

If the cancer comes back

If the cancer does return at some point, your treatment options will depend on where the cancer is, what treatments you've had before, and your health. Surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, targeted therapy, immunotherapy, or some combination of these might be options. Other types of treatment might also be used to help relieve any symptoms from the cancer. For more information on how recurrent cancer is treated, see [Treatment Choices for Kidney Cancer, by Stage](#)¹⁰.

For more general information on recurrence, you may also want to see [Understanding Recurrence](#)¹¹.

Getting emotional support

It's normal to feel [depressed, anxious, or worried](#)¹² when kidney cancer is a part of your life. Some people are affected more than others. But everyone can benefit from [help and support](#)¹³ from other people, whether friends and family, religious groups, support groups, professional counselors, or others. Learn more in [Life After Cancer](#)¹⁴.

Second cancers after treatment

Cancer survivors can be affected by a number of health problems, but often a major concern is facing cancer again. Cancer that comes back after treatment is called a recurrence. But some cancer survivors may develop a new, unrelated cancer later. This is called a second cancer.

Unfortunately, being treated for kidney cancer doesn't mean you can't get another cancer. People who have had cancer can still get the same types of cancers that other people get. In fact, they might be at a higher risk of certain types of cancer including:

- A second kidney cancer (this is different from the first cancer coming back). The risk of a second kidney cancer is highest in patients who were diagnosed before age 50.
- [Bladder cancer](#)¹⁵
- Cancer of the ureter (the tube that connects the kidney to the bladder)

- [Prostate cancer](#)¹⁶
- [Thyroid cancer](#)¹⁷
- [Melanoma of the skin](#)¹⁸

Can I lower my risk of getting a second cancer?

There are steps you can take to lower your risk and stay as healthy as possible. For example, people who have had kidney cancer should do their best to [stay away from tobacco products](#)¹⁹. Smoking might further increase the risk of some of the second cancers that are more common after kidney cancer.

To help maintain good health, kidney cancer survivors should also:

- Get to and stay at a [healthy weight](#)²⁰
- Keep [physically active](#)²¹ and limit sitting or lying down time
- Follow a [healthy eating pattern](#)²² that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and that limits or avoids red and processed meats, sugary drinks, and highly processed foods.
- It's best not to drink [alcohol](#)²³. If you do drink, have no more than 1 drink per day for women or 2 drinks per day for men

These steps might also lower the risk of some other health problems.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/when-cancer-doesnt-go-away.html
2. www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/tests.html
3. www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/tests/imaging-radiology-tests-for-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/kidney-cancer/detection-diagnosis-staging/staging.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/kidney-cancer/treating.html
6. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-guidelines/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer.html
7. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/survivorship-care-plans.html
8. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-

- [after-treatment/keeping-copies-of-important-medical-records.html](#)
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/tobacco-and-cancer/health-risks-of-smoking-tobacco.html
 10. www.cancer.org/cancer/kidney-cancer/treating/by-stage.html
 11. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html
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 21. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/get-active.html
 22. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/eat-healthy.html
 23. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html

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