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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](#)

Cancer Concerns After Treatment

Treatment may remove or destroy the cancer, but it is very common to worry about the risk of another cancer, the cancer coming back, or treatment no longer working.

- [Second Cancers After Kidney Cancer](#)

Living as a Kidney Cancer Survivor

For some people with kidney cancer, treatment can remove or destroy the cancer. The end of treatment can be both stressful and exciting. You may be relieved to finish treatment, but 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

can be difficult and very stressful.

Life after kidney cancer means returning to some familiar things and also making some new choices.

Ask your doctor for a survivorship care plan

Talk with your doctor about developing a survivorship care plan for you. This plan might include:

- A suggested schedule for follow-up exams and tests
- A schedule for other tests you might need in the future, such as early detection (screening) tests for other types of cancer, or tests 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
- Diet and physical activity suggestions
- Reminders to keep your appointments with your primary care provider (PCP), who will monitor your general health care

Follow-up care

Even if you have completed treatment, you will likely have follow-up visits with your doctor for many years. 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 do exams and lab tests or imaging tests to look for signs of cancer or treatment side effects.

Some treatment side effects might last a long time or 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 report any new symptoms to the doctor right away.

To some extent, the frequency of follow up visits and tests will depend on the stage of your cancer, the treatment you received, and the chance of it coming back.

Survivors of kidney cancer should also follow the [American Cancer Society guidelines for the early detection of cancer](#)¹, such as those for breast, cervical, lung, and prostate cancer.

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 to give your new doctor the details of your diagnosis and treatment. Learn more in [Keeping Copies of Important Medical Records²](#).

Can I lower my risk of kidney cancer coming back?

Most people want to know if there are specific lifestyle changes they can make to reduce their risk of cancer coming back. Unfortunately, for most cancers there is little solid evidence to guide people. This doesn't mean that nothing will help – it's just that for the most part this is an area that hasn't been well studied. Most studies have looked at lifestyle changes as ways of preventing cancer in the first place, not slowing it down or keeping it from coming back.

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 not smoking, eating well, being active, 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.

Lifestyle Changes After Cancer of the Kidney

You can't change the fact that you have had cancer. What you can change is how you live the rest of your life – making choices to help you stay healthy and feel as well as you can. This can be a time to look at your life in new ways. Maybe you are thinking about how to improve your health over the long term. Some people even start during cancer treatment.

Making healthier choices

For many people, a diagnosis of cancer helps them focus on their health in ways they may not have thought much about in the past. Are there things you could do that might make you healthier? Maybe you could try [to eat better or get more exercise³](#). Maybe you could cut down on [alcohol⁴](#), or [give up tobacco⁵](#). Even things like keeping your

stress level under control may help. Now is a good time to think about making changes that can have positive effects for the rest of your life. You will feel better and you will also be healthier.

You can start by working on those things that worry you most. Get help with those that are harder for you. For instance, if you are [thinking about quitting smoking and need help](#)⁶, call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-227-2345.

Eating better

Eating right can be hard for anyone, but it can get even tougher during and after cancer treatment. Treatment may change your sense of taste. Nausea can be a problem. You may not feel like eating and lose weight when you don't want to. Or you may have gained weight that you can't seem to lose. All of these things can be very frustrating.

During treatment: Many people lose weight or have taste problems during treatment. If this happens to you, do the best you can. Eat whatever appeals to you. Eat what you can, when you can. Now is not the time to restrict your diet. You may find it helps to eat small portions every 2 to 3 hours. Try to keep in mind that these problems usually improve over time. You may want to ask your cancer team about seeing a dietitian, an expert in nutrition who can give you ideas on how to optimize your weight and diet during treatment.

After treatment: One of the best things you can do after cancer treatment is put healthy eating habits into place. You may be surprised at the long-term benefits of some simple changes.

To help maintain good health, survivors should:

- Get to and stay at a healthy weight
- Keep physically active
- Eat a healthy diet, with an emphasis on plant foods
- Limit alcohol to no more than 1 drink per day for women or 2 drinks per day for men

These steps may also lower the risk of some cancers, as well as having many other health benefits.

For more information, see [Nutrition and Physical Activity During and After Cancer Treatment: Answers to Common Questions](#)⁷.

Rest, fatigue, and exercise

Extreme tiredness, called *fatigue*, is very common in people treated for cancer. This is not a normal tiredness, but a bone-weary exhaustion that often doesn't get better with rest. For some people, fatigue lasts a long time after treatment, and can make it hard for them to be active and do other things they want to do. But exercise can help reduce fatigue. Studies have shown that patients who follow an exercise program tailored to their personal needs feel better physically and emotionally and can cope better, too.

If you were sick and not very active during treatment, it is normal for your fitness, endurance, and muscle strength to decline. Any plan for physical activity should fit your own situation. A person who has never exercised will not be able to take on the same amount of exercise as someone who plays tennis twice a week. If you haven't been active in a few years, you will have to start slowly – maybe just by taking short walks.

Talk with your health care team before starting any exercises. Get their opinion about your exercise plans. Then, try to find an exercise buddy so you're not doing it alone. Having family or friends involved when starting a new activity program can give you that extra boost of support to keep you going when the push just isn't there.

If you are very tired, you will need to balance activity with rest. It is OK to rest when you need to. Sometimes it's hard for people to allow themselves to rest when they are used to working all day or taking care of a household, but this is not the time to push yourself too hard. Listen to your body and rest when you need to. For more information on dealing with fatigue, see [Cancer-related Fatigue](#)⁸ and [Anemia in People with Cancer](#)⁹.

Keep in mind exercise can improve your physical and emotional health.

- It improves your cardiovascular (heart and circulation) fitness.
- Along with a good diet, it will help you get to and stay at a healthy weight.
- It makes your muscles stronger.
- It reduces fatigue and helps you have more energy.
- It can help lower anxiety and depression.
- It can make you feel happier.
- It helps you feel better about yourself.

And long term, we know that getting regular physical activity plays a role in helping to lower the risk of some cancers, as well as having other health benefits.

If the cancer comes back

If the cancer does recur at some point, your treatment options will depend on where the

cancer is located, what treatments you've had before, and your health. For more information on how recurrent cancer is treated, see [Treatment Choices by Stage of Kidney Cancer](#)¹⁰.

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

Could I get a second cancer after kidney cancer treatment?

People who've had kidney cancer can still get other cancers. In fact, kidney cancer survivors are at higher risk for getting another kidney cancer, as well as some other types of cancer. Learn more in [Second Cancers After Kidney Cancer](#).

Moving on after kidney cancer

Some amount of feeling [depressed, anxious, or worried](#)¹² is normal when kidney cancer is a part of your life. Some people are affected more than others. But everyone can benefit from help and support from other people, whether friends and family, religious groups, support groups, professional counselors, or others.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/healthy/find-cancer-early/cancer-screening-guidelines/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer.html
2. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/keeping-copies-of-important-medical-records.html
3. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html
5. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html
6. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco/guide-quitting-smoking.html
7. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/nutrition/nutrition-and-physical-activity-during-and-after-cancer-treatment.html
8. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/fatigue.html
9. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/low-blood-counts/anemia.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
12. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/emotional-side-effects.html

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Second Cancers After Kidney Cancer

Cancer survivors can be affected by many health problems, but often their greatest concern is facing cancer again. If a cancer comes back after treatment it is called a recurrence. But some cancer survivors may develop a new, unrelated cancer later. This is called a second cancer. No matter what type of cancer you have had, it is still possible to get another (new) cancer, even after surviving the first.

Unfortunately, being treated for 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, certain types of cancer and cancer treatments can be linked to a higher risk of specific second cancers.

Survivors of kidney cancer can get any type of second cancer, but they have an increased risk of:

- A second kidney cancer (this is different than the first cancer coming back)
- [Bladder cancer](#)¹
- Cancer of the ureter (the tube that connects the kidney to the bladder)
- [Prostate cancer](#)²
- [Thyroid cancer](#)³
- [Melanoma of the skin](#)⁴

The risk of a second kidney cancer is highest in patients who were diagnosed before age 50.

See [Second Cancers in Adults](#)⁵ for more information about causes of second cancers.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/bladder-cancer.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/prostate-cancer.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/thyroid-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/melanoma-skin-cancer.html
5. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html

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