



# How to talk to your doctor about kidney cancer



You may have just learned you have kidney cancer (renal cancer) which is when cells in your kidneys grow out of control and form tumors. Over the next few months, you will work with your doctors to form a plan. There are a lot of questions when it comes to cancer. Below are some tips and questions to ask your healthcare team to help you stay involved and informed.

The most common type of kidney cancer found in adults is renal cell carcinoma (RCC). There are two major categories:

1. **Clear cell renal cell carcinoma (ccRCC):** the most common type of all kidney cancers
2. **Non-clear cell renal cell carcinoma (ncRCC):** an umbrella term for other kinds of RCC

It's important to communicate with your healthcare team and have open and honest discussions. The list of questions below can help guide meaningful conversations, so you can take an active role in your health.



To keep track of your questions consider bringing a notebook, take notes on your phone, or bring a loved one with you to provide support and take additional notes.

## DIAGNOSIS:

Kidney cancer is diagnosed through different tests, including physical exams, blood tests, urine tests, imaging tests, and kidney biopsies. It may be overwhelming to have multiple tests done and to understand what your doctor is doing and why.

### You can ask your doctor these questions throughout the diagnostic process:

- What type of kidney cancer do I have?
- Why are you doing this test and what can we learn from it?
- Has the cancer spread to other parts of my body?
- Do you know the stage of my cancer? If so, what does that mean for me?
- Should I think about genetic testing and counseling for myself or my family?
- How serious is my cancer?
- What are my chances of survival?
- How will my type and stage of cancer affect my treatment choices?

## TREATMENT:

Treatment for kidney cancer commonly involves surgery to remove the affected area or, in some cases, the entire affected kidney. The kind of surgery depends on the type of cancer you have and how severe it is.

**Instead of, or in addition to surgery, your doctor may recommend other treatments, such as:**

- *Thermal ablation*: a procedure that uses heat or cold to kill cancer cells
- *Radiation therapy (radiotherapy)*: a treatment that uses high doses of radiation to kill cancer cells and shrink tumors
- *Chemotherapy*: a treatment that stops cancer cells from growing and spreading
- *Immunotherapy*: a treatment that boosts your immune system to fight cancer
- *Targeted drug therapy*: a treatment that uses drugs to target specific cancer cells
- *Active surveillance*: closely watching the cancer through exams and tests to see if treatment is needed

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**When you start to have conversations about potential treatment options, you can ask these questions to learn more about your doctor and healthcare team's experience to make sure you are getting the best care possible:**

- How much experience do you have with this kind of cancer?
- Will I need surgery?
- Is there a clinical trial that might be right for me?

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**When it comes time to decide on a treatment, you can ask these questions to learn more about your options:**

- What can I expect from my treatment plan?
- What is the goal of treatment?
- What are my treatment options?
- What treatment do you suggest?
- What are the benefits and risks of this treatment?
- What are the possible side effects of the treatment?
- How soon do I need to start treatment?
- How long will treatment sessions take and how many will I need?
- How can I prepare for treatment?
- Where will I go for treatment?
- What should I bring with me for treatment?
- Can someone come with me to treatment sessions?
- What if the treatment is not successful?

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**As you receive your treatment, you may have questions about what is happening and what comes next. Here are some questions you can ask your doctor:**

- How am I responding to treatment?
- Do side effects mean the treatment is working?
- Are there any additional medicines I should be taking to manage my side effects?
- What follow up tests will I need and how often will I need them?
- Who will explain my results to me?
- Should I anticipate side effects from my current treatment, even after it ends?

