



Chapter 5: Symptoms and diagnosis of kidney cancer

This chapter is part of a series of materials. For more information, and to access further materials, please visit www.KEYTRUDA.co.uk

For patients being treated with KEYTRUDA[®] (pembrolizumab) in combination with axitinib for advanced renal cell carcinoma

Your healthcare team should have provided you with materials to help you identify any side effects you may experience on your treatment. Ensure you read the Patient Safety Information Brochure and carry your Patient Alert Card with you at all times.

It is important to be aware of side effects. Telling your healthcare professional straight away as soon as you notice any symptoms may stop them from becoming more serious.

DO NOT ATTEMPT TO DIAGNOSE OR TREAT SIDE EFFECTS YOURSELF.

If you get any side effects, talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse. This includes any possible side effects not listed in the package leaflet. You can also report side effects directly via the Yellow Card Scheme at: <https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/> or search for MHRA Yellow Card in the Google Play or Apple App Store. Adverse events should also be reported to Merck Sharp & Dohme Limited (tel: 01992 467272). By reporting side effects you can help provide more information on the safety of this medicine.



Symptoms and diagnosis of kidney cancer

Why have I been tested for kidney cancer?

Kidney cancer can often start to grow without showing any obvious symptoms which means it can be hard to spot.

In many cases, a healthcare professional (such as your nurse or doctor) will notice some suspicious symptoms while checking for another condition. If they think that symptoms are similar to those of kidney cancer, they will refer you for further testing.

Some of the symptoms your healthcare professional might have noticed include:



Urine

- Blood in the urine (wee) is the most common symptom. Half (50%) of kidney cancer patients have this when they first go to the doctor.



General

- A high temperature that isn't caused by infection and doesn't go away
- Weight loss that isn't caused by dieting
- Tiredness (fatigue)
- Loss of appetite



Muscles, nerves, joints and limbs

- A lump on the side or lower back
- Low back pain on one side, which isn't caused by an injury



Blood

- Anaemia (low red blood cell count)
- High blood pressure

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How do doctors diagnose kidney cancer?

Confirming whether the symptoms are due to cancer

Some of the symptoms of kidney cancer are similar to those for other health conditions, particularly infections.

To help rule out these other health conditions your doctor could ask you to have a urine or blood test, or a biopsy. These tests are then analysed in a laboratory.

As well as excluding other health conditions, the results can also suggest that cancer cells are present.



Some of the tests your doctor may suggest:

Urine test: A urine test can help rule out other causes of symptoms such as infections

Full blood count (FBC): A FBC is a type of blood test which measures the number of different cells in your blood. Kidney cancer patients often have a low count of red blood cells (anaemia).

Biopsy: Sometimes, a doctor will do a biopsy. A biopsy is when a doctor uses a thin needle to remove a small sample of tissue from your kidney. Doctors look at this under a microscope to check for signs of cancer.

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How do doctors diagnose kidney cancer?



Imaging tests

Confirming a diagnosis with imaging tests

If the tests suggest that you could have kidney cancer, your healthcare team will use imaging tests to explore it further.

Doctors use imaging tests to confirm a diagnosis of kidney cancer. It can also provide some information on how large a cancer is and if it has spread beyond the kidney to other parts of your body.

Ultrasound scan: This scan uses sound waves to create a picture of your organs. More than half (50%) of adult kidney cancers are found this way.

Computed Tomography (CT) scan: This scan uses X-rays to take pictures of your organs from different angles and then creates a 3D image. CT scans are used to check the size of the tumour and if it has spread beyond the kidney.



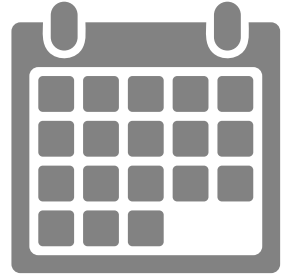
Sometimes, doctors find kidney cancer in a person who is having these tests for another reason.

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Waiting for the results

The results from your imaging tests can take up to a couple of weeks to arrive. Waiting for these results can be an anxious and stressful time. However, it is important to remember that there are people to help you. If you have any concerns, talk to your healthcare team. Some example questions you can ask them are noted at the end of this chapter.

After the results have been analysed by your doctor, they will ask you to go to a meeting where they will explain the results to you.



What are stages of kidney cancer?

If your doctor does confirm that you have kidney cancer, their first step is to find out exactly what size it is, and whether it has spread to other parts of the body. This is known as **staging**.



How doctors work out your cancer stage

Doctors may use one or more imaging test to find the stage of the cancer. These tests are not painful.

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Staging tests: Your healthcare team will decide which tests are suitable for you. You may not receive all of the below tests.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI): This test uses radio waves to check the size of a tumour and if it has spread beyond the kidney to other organs.



Chest X-ray: Sometimes, kidney cancer can spread to the lungs. X-rays are used to see if this has happened. They can also help to check for other chest problems.



Bone scan: In some cases, the doctor will inject a mildly radioactive material to see if the kidney cancer has spread to the bone.



Blood vessel test (angiography): The doctor may use CT scan, MRI, or X-rays to map the blood vessels around the kidneys that supply a tumour with blood.



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TNM staging

Your doctor, or other healthcare professional, may refer to your kidney cancer using the **TNM (Tumour, Node, Metastasis)** staging system. The TNM score uses letters and numbers for healthcare professionals to describe stages in a more detailed but shorthand way. TNM staging also helps doctors find the best treatment for you.

TNM staging describes 3 important pieces of information which you may see on your medical notes:

1. The size of the primary **tumour (T)**
2. If the cancer has spread to your lymph **nodes (N)**
3. If the cancer has spread (**metastasised**) to other organs (**M**)



Your doctor may refer to your kidney cancer using the **TNM** staging system

After your staging tests

After all your imaging and staging tests have been looked at and analysed by the medical team, your doctor will tell you about your options about your treatment plan and what you need to do for the next steps.

References

1. NHS Health A to Z. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-cancer/symptoms/> (Accessed September 2020)
2. Cancer Research UK. Available at <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/> (Accessed September 2020)
3. Cancer.Net. Available at <https://www.cancer.net/> (Accessed September 2020)
4. Kidney Cancer UK. Available at <https://www.kcuk.org.uk/> (Accessed September 2020)

Symptoms and diagnosis of kidney cancer

Questions about kidney cancer symptoms and diagnosis:

You will probably have a lot of questions but may not know where to start.

It is important to remember that healthcare providers are there to support you and it is ok to ask about what you are going through. Consider these questions, and if you want to know more, talk about them with your doctor or others on your healthcare team:

What is the purpose of the tests I am having?

When and where will I have these tests?

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Who will give me the results, and when will I get them?

Where did the cancer start?

What is the stage of my cancer?

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What are the average survival rates for my type of cancer?

Who can I contact if I think of more questions later?

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