



Chapter 6: Treating 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.



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How do doctors treat advanced kidney cancer?

After kidney cancer has been diagnosed, doctors and other healthcare professionals work together as a team to create your treatment plan.



Your healthcare team may include:

- **Doctors**, including:
 - Specialist surgeon (**urologist**)
 - Cancer specialist (**oncologist**)
 - Specialist in scans and x-rays (**radiologist**)
 - Specialist in analysing tissue samples (**pathologist**)
- A **specialist cancer nurse**
- A **dietitian**, who will help you plan healthy meals
- **Physiotherapists**, who will help you stay active and regain movement after surgery
- **Occupational therapists**, who will help you improve your ability to do everyday tasks
- **Psychologists and counsellors**
- And other **healthcare professionals**.

Throughout your treatment, some members of your healthcare team will meet to discuss treatment options suitable for you. You may overhear this meeting being called the **multi-disciplinary team** or **MDT** meeting. These meetings vary in the way they are run between hospitals and different parts of the country.

Following a discussion, they will recommend the type of treatment that they think is best. They may offer a choice of treatments. The reason these meetings are held is so treatment decisions are not made solely by one person and it is a team decision.

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What are the types of treatment for kidney cancer?

There are different treatments for kidney cancer which are used at different stages. This guide covers the types of treatment that are more likely to be used for your specific type of kidney cancer, advanced Renal Cell Carcinoma (RCC). These may include:



Active surveillance

Active surveillance can also be known as watchful waiting. If your cancer is small and is only in one of your kidneys, healthcare professionals may decide that treatment is not needed. Instead they will watch the tumour through regular testing and appointments. You may be asked to have a new scan after 3 to 6 months to see if anything has changed.



Watch the tumour through regular testing and appointments

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Surgery



Surgery may not be a suitable option for everyone. Your healthcare team will recommend it if it is right for you. Please ask your healthcare team for more information if you are preparing for, or recovering from, surgery.

Surgery is a common treatment for kidney cancer. In some cases, surgery may cure the cancer completely. There are 2 main forms of surgery for kidney cancer:

- Surgery where only the cancerous part of a kidney is removed (this is called a **partial nephrectomy**)
- Surgery where a whole kidney and surrounding lymph nodes are removed (this is called **radical nephrectomy**).

Remember, you have 2 kidneys, and it is possible to carry on with many of your daily activities even if doctors need to remove part, or all, of one of them as the remaining kidney 'picks up' the work of both.

Surgery can be carried out in different ways and your healthcare team will choose the type of surgery that benefits you the most. To find out more about surgery, download **Chapter 8: Surgery for advanced kidney cancer**.

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Cryotherapy

Cryotherapy is a procedure which **freezes** the cancer and destroys it.

- A surgeon will insert a small tube under your skin and use liquid nitrogen to freeze any signs of cancer. This is normally done under local or general anaesthetic
- Cryotherapy is usually offered if your cancer is small and still located within the kidney



Radio frequency ablation

Radio frequency ablation uses high powered, but focused radio waves to heat the cancer up, which causes the cells to die

- A surgeon will insert a small needle (which has a probe at the end) under your skin and directly into the tumour. This is normally done under local or general anaesthetic
- Radio frequency ablation is usually offered if your cancer is small and still located within the kidney

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Targeted therapy and immunotherapy

If your cancer has spread beyond the kidneys to other parts of the body, surgery may not be possible.

If surgery is not an option, doctors may prescribe you medicines called **targeted therapy** or **immunotherapy**. These can travel throughout the whole body where they work against the cancer cells.

1

Targeted therapy (TKI)

- Blood vessels are needed so that all cells can survive, however blood vessels also allow cancer cells to grow. TKIs target blood vessels and block the growth of new blood vessels to cancer cells, which then stop growing. TKIs are given orally as a tablet.

2

Immunotherapy

- The body has natural defences called the immune system, which attacks and destroys cancer cells. However, many cancers hide by making proteins that stop the immune system from working properly. Immunotherapy blocks these proteins and helps restore the immune system's ability to detect and destroy cancer cells. Immunotherapy is a medicine given by infusion.

References

1. NHS. Kidney Cancer. Available at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-cancer/> (Accessed September 2020)
2. Kidney Cancer UK. Available at <https://www.kcuk.org.uk/> (Accessed September 2020)
3. Cancer Research UK. Available at <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/> (Accessed September 2020)

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Questions about kidney cancer treatment

Think about these questions and discuss them with your doctor or others on your healthcare team:

What kidney cancer treatment, or treatments, will be recommended for me?

What is the aim of the treatment?

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What are the possible side effects of the treatment?

How successful is the treatment likely to be?

What are the possible benefits and the risks of the treatment?

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How often will I need to go to the hospital?

If I need to go into the hospital, how long will it be for?

What will be the effects on my family and social life?

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What will be the effect on my work?

Please download **Chapter 7: Living with kidney cancer** for more information about employment

What will be the overall effects on my finances?

Please download **Chapter 7: Living with kidney cancer** for more information about money and finances

Where can I find more information about treatments?

