



condition

Kidney Cancer

class

Cancer

description

The organs and tissues of the body are made up of tiny building blocks called cells. Cancer is a disease of these cells. Rather than dividing in a normal and controlled manner, cancer cells are abnormal cells which carry on dividing and develop into a malignant tumour.

Each year, about 6200 people in the UK are diagnosed with kidney (renal cell) cancer. It affects more men than women and becomes more common as people get older. It is rare for people under 40 to get kidney cancer, but there is an uncommon type (Wilms' tumour – also known as nephroblastoma) that affects very young children.

Cancer of the kidney isn't infectious and can't be passed on to other people. Usually only one kidney is affected.

causes

Doctors don't know exactly what causes kidney cancer and for many people the cause is never found, but a number of things are known to increase the risk of developing it.

- Cigarette smoking may increase the risk by as much as double for some people.
- Being overweight (obese).
- Some medical conditions such as having high blood pressure (hypertension) may increase the risk. People with advanced kidney disease, especially those who need to have dialysis, have a higher risk of developing kidney cancer.
- Exposure to certain materials at work – these include cadmium, lead or asbestos.
- Working with blast furnaces or coke-ovens has also been linked to an increased risk of kidney cancer.
- Most kidney cancers aren't inherited, but occasionally two or more members of the same family develop kidney cancer. In this case, other members of the family may have a higher than average risk of getting kidney cancer.
- In rare conditions, such as von Hippel-Lindau disease, an inherited faulty gene increases the risk of developing kidney cancer.

symptoms

Kidney cancers don't always cause any symptoms. So it may be discovered by chance when a person is having scans done for another reason.

If there are symptoms, the most common is blood in the urine. This may come and go but, if you ever see blood in your urine, you should get it checked out.

Other symptoms may include painful spasms in the ureters or the bladder, a lump in the area of the kidney, a dull pain in the side, a persistent high temperature, night-sweats, tiredness and weight loss.

how it is diagnosed

Usually, your GP will examine you, take a urine test, and arrange for any other tests or x-rays that may be necessary. These will be carried out at a hospital, where you can receive expert advice and treatment. Tests may include a IVU (intravenous urogram), a test which shows up anything unusual in the kidneys, an ultrasound scan, and a CT scan.

treatment

Surgery is the main treatment for kidney cancer. There are two main types:

- A nephrectomy which is removal of the whole kidney, or
- A partial nephrectomy which removes part of the kidney.

If all of the cancer can't be removed by surgery, or if the cancer has spread to other parts of the body, other treatments may be used. These may include biological treatments, which work by encouraging the body's immune system to attack the cancer. Occasionally chemotherapy, radiotherapy or hormonal treatment is used. Targeted treatments, which are aimed at particular proteins in the cancer cell have also been developed but are not widely available.

when to see a doctor

If you have any of the above symptoms, you should get them checked out with your doctor. Bear in mind, most people will not have kidney cancer - other more common conditions such as an infection or kidney stones can also cause these symptoms.

This page is produced by Macmillan Cancer Support. Macmillan Cancer Support improves the lives of people affected by cancer. We provide practical, medical, emotional and financial support, and push for better cancer care. Through the merger with Cancerbackup in 2008, we now provide up-to-date information about cancer, cancer treatments and living with cancer, free to anyone affected by cancer and health professionals.

For more information see www.cancerbackup.org.uk and www.macmillan.org.uk

To speak to a cancer information nurse specialist, call 0808 800 1234 (Monday–Friday, 9am–8pm)

For concerns and questions about living with cancer, call 0808 808 2020 (Monday–Friday, 9am–8pm)

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