What is Kidney Cancer?

Most patients are diagnosed with kidney cancer between the ages of 55 and 74.

1. Introduction

Kidney cancer starts with cancer cells growing rapidly, becoming cancerous tumors. From renal cell carcinoma (RCC) to renal sarcoma, each type of kidney cancer acts differently from another. RCC is the most commonly diagnosed type, accounting for 9 out of 10 kidney cancers. The other types — transitional cell carcinoma, Wilms tumor, and renal sarcoma are rarer.

Beyond this cancer, people can develop benign tumors as well. Proper scanning and diagnosis are needed to determine which type it is and, if it is cancerous, what stage it is.

2. Risk Factors

For any kidney cancer, certain factors may increase the risk of developing it:

+ Older age
+ Smoking tobacco
+ Obesity
+ High blood pressure
+ Some inherited conditions (e.g. tuberous sclerosis complex)
+ Family history of kidney cancer

3. Diagnosis

When determining if someone has kidney cancer, physicians will look for symptoms — like blood in the urine or persistent pain in the side or back — along with testing. Some tests include:

+ General physical exams
+ Medical and family history check
+ Blood and urine tests
+ CT scans
+ Chest X-rays

Nearly half of tumors are found while conducting a CT scan or X-ray, with other kidney cancers being found when scanning for other conditions.

4. Treatment

Each treatment depends on the type and stage of kidney cancer. Common treatments include active surveillance of the tumor(s), surgery, ablation, immunotherapy and targeted therapies. Surgery is the most common treatment, with some or all of the affected kidney being removed. If cancer has grown into nearby organs, surgeons typically also remove those affected areas as well.

While diagnoses for kidney cancer have been increasing, death rates have also been declining. Improved screening and successful treatments both contribute to this positive outcome for cancer patients.

Did you know?

Over a lifetime, 1 in 45 men and 1 in 75 women will develop kidney cancer.

For more information on kidney cancer, please visit the American Cancer Society.

References

Overview of Kidney Cancer and Key Statistics: American Cancer Society

Kidney Cancer Diagnosis and Stages: Kidney Cancer Association

Types of Kidney Cancer: National Kidney Foundation

Risk Factors for Developing Kidney Cancer: Mayo Clinic

Kidney Cancer Management and Treatment: Cleveland Clinic

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