

Fact sheet

Support for Kidney Cancer

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Introduction

Our series of kidney cancer fact sheets have been developed to help you understand more about kidney cancer. This fact sheet provides support information for people affected by kidney cancer.

For more information relating to other aspects of kidney cancer please see our other fact sheets:

- Kidney Cancer
- Diagnosis and Types of Kidney Cancer
- Localised Kidney Cancer
- Advanced Kidney Cancer
- Advanced Kidney Cancer – Dealing with the side effects of medication: targeted therapy
- Kidney Cancer – Make the most of your visit to the doctor

These fact sheets are meant as an introduction only and are not meant to be a substitute for your doctor's or healthcare professional's advice. Always consult your doctor or healthcare professional for more advice.

The most important and powerful person in your healthcare is actually you! There are many steps that you can take to become an advocate in your own healthcare. Learning about kidney cancer and understanding the things that you can do to maximise your own health and well-being are incredibly valuable. However, you are not alone! There are lots of people and organisations there to support you.



What can I do to look after myself?

Cancer and its treatment can have a huge physical and emotional effect on you. It is important to look after yourself – your physical and emotional wellbeing.

Physical wellbeing

It is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Why should I quit smoking if the damage has already been done?

It is never too late to quit smoking. Research has shown that people with kidney cancer who do not smoke live longer than those who do smoke.

Quitline doubles your chance of quitting smoking for good. Call 13 78 48.

How will exercise help?

Recent research has shown that exercise is beneficial for people with cancer. Moderate regular exercise has been shown to:

- Increase your energy levels
- Elevate your mood
- Help you cope with the side effects of medications
- Boost your immune system to help it fight your cancer
- Help control weight – gaining weight during and after cancer treatment may increase the risk of cancer recurrence.

What is more – there are no harmful effects of moderate exercise. The sooner you start the better you will feel.

Exercise tips:

- Do not over do it at the start, you may become discouraged and stop all together
- If you exercised regularly before cancer, lower the intensity of your workouts for a while
- Aim to be as physically active as you can. Try to do at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise on most days of the week
- If you don't have the energy to exercise for a full 30 minutes, break it down into three 10 minute sessions
- Exercise with a friend to keep you motivated and make it more fun
- Drink plenty of water
- Warm up with some gentle stretches
- Don't exercise if you feel unwell.

Ask if your hospital has a special exercise program for people with cancer or if they can refer you to a specialised exercise physiologist. Talk to your doctor before starting an exercise program.

Is healthy eating important?

Yes. Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet is especially important if you have cancer. Both cancer and its treatments can change which nutrients and how much energy your body needs. You may also not be able to tolerate certain foods.

Eating a healthy well-balanced diet might help you:

- Feel better
- Keep up your energy and strength
- Maintain a healthy body weight and your body's store of nutrients
- Cope with side effects better
- Lower your risk of getting an infection
- Heal and recover faster.

A healthy, well-balanced diet involves eating a variety of foods from each food group daily, in the recommended amounts. These food groups include proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals.

The nutrient needs of people with cancer vary from person to person. Talk to a dietitian or your doctor to help you plan a well-balanced diet to help you fight cancer.

Emotional wellbeing

Anxiety and depression are quite common in people who have or had cancer.

Could I be suffering from anxiety?

Anxiety is more than a passing feeling of being worried. Do you often feel like you:

- Constantly feel stressed?
- Are constantly agitated or angry?
- Have difficulty sleeping?
- Have difficulty concentrating or making decisions?
- Avoid distressing issues and situations?
- Have a need to be constantly reassured?

If you answered yes to any of these you may be suffering from anxiety.

Could I be depressed?

Depression is more than a passing phase of being happy or sad. Do you often feel like you:

- Cannot get out of bed?
- Have lost motivation to do anything, including things that used to give you pleasure?
- Have a black cloud hanging over your head?
- Are unreasonably moody or angry or anti-social?
- Are not interested in how you look?
- Want to end your life?
- Eat excessive amounts of food or drink excessive amounts of alcohol?

If you answered yes to any of these you may be depressed.

You need to talk to someone you trust who can assess you properly. Your GP is a good option. Your GP will be able to recommend counselling or medication to treat your depression or anxiety. The organisation Beyond Blue has information and support for coping with anxiety and depression. Call 1300 224 636 or visit the website www.beyondblue.org.au. Alternatively call Life Line 13 11 14.

Sexuality

Cancer and its treatments can affect your sexuality. This can be for many different reasons. It may be because of your emotional state, low self-confidence, decreased energy levels, medication side effects or your relationship with your partner.

Even if you don't have sexual intercourse with your partner it is important to maintain intimacy and closeness.

Maintain intimacy and closeness with your partner though holding hands, hugging or massage.



What about alternative and complementary therapies?

Complementary therapies

Complementary therapies can work with established medical treatments to improve quality of life and symptoms.

Complementary therapies include:

- Remedial massage therapy
- Yoga
- Acupressure
- Acupuncture
- Aromatherapy
- Chiropractic
- Osteopathy*
- Relaxation techniques
- Mindfulness meditation
- Homoeopathy
- Prayer

*If there were any chance that the kidney cancer has spread to bones, chiropractic or osteopathy is not advisable. Please talk to your healthcare professional to decide if complementary therapy is safe for you.



Alternative therapies

Alternative therapies are therapies that are not scientifically proven to cure cancer or help. In fact some alternative therapies are harmful and can also interfere with the medications prescribed by your doctor. A good website to check if an alternative therapy has been debunked is www.quackwatch.org.

Examples of alternative therapies are mega-dose vitamins, herbal products, extreme diets and crystals.

Where can I go to for support?

Having cancer can be very lonely and overwhelming. It is not good for you to deal with everything on your own. You are going to need some form of emotional and social support. You need people you can turn to for strength and comfort.

Your healthcare professionals will be able to offer you some support but there are others you can turn to too.

Your family and friends are there to support you

Family and friends are an invaluable source of support, whether it's helping with the shopping, coming to doctor appointments or simply being with you. Let your family and friends, and anyone else who you think can help, be there for you.

How will my family and friends react to my cancer diagnosis?

Your cancer diagnosis will affect your family and friends and your relationship with them. Just as you will take time to adjust to your diagnosis so will your family and friends.

You may think that if you do not talk to your family and friends about your cancer and your feelings, that you are protecting them. However, not talking to them will only make them feel shut out and scared. Let them in – it will help you and help them.

Remember that people deal with bad news in different ways. Some people will try and pretend nothing has happened, others will be overly cheerful and positive, some will need to talk about what is going on and others may avoid you. Everyone will be different and cope in different ways. You may find it useful to talk about your cancer and your feelings with each other.

Do not underestimate the role your partner or close friend will play in all aspects of your well-being and motivation to stay positive. Do not forget they will be suffering too. They will need help and support as well as you.

There are other people and organisations there to support you

Some people find that it is enough to talk to family and friends. Other people find it useful to talk to other people who have or had cancer, or to someone trained in supporting people with cancer. It is good to know that you are not alone and that there are other people who understand what you are going through. Often it is easier to talk openly and honestly to someone who is not close to you. That way you can just worry about your concerns and not those of your family or friends.

There are many different ways to get support and information. Which one you choose is very personal. It depends on your personality and situation.

Telephone support – talk on the phone to someone trained in supporting people with cancer:

- Free call our Kidney Health Information Service – 1800 454 363
- Free call the Cancer Council Helpline – 13 11 20 or visit the Cancer Council website

Online support communities – chat online to other people who have had kidney cancer using an online cancer forum

- connect with others using our Kidney Forum - www.kidney.org.au/connect/forum/your-kidney-forum - where you can relate your stories, ask questions, share practical information and, most of all, support each other.
- or try www.cancerconnections.com.au

Peer support groups – match you with someone who has had a similar cancer experience.

Telephone support groups – facilitated by trained counsellors.

Face-to-face groups – often held in community centres or hospitals.

A church or spiritual group – if you are a member of a church or spiritual group they are often a great source of support.

Talk to us at Kidney Health Australia, your social worker, your nurse or Cancer Council about what is available in your area.

What happens next?

The time after completing cancer treatment can bring a whole new set of physical, emotional, social and financial challenges. There are specific Cancer Survivor resources available to you if you need help and support.

Cancer Council – call 13 11 20

Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre – visit www.petermac.org

I am a carer for someone with cancer. What can I do?

Being a carer for a loved one with cancer can be rewarding. But it can also be tiring, stressful, challenging and cause you a lot of anxiety. It is important that you make sure you look after yourself and take some time just for you. It is also important that you get some help and support too.

Here are some suggestions to help you look after yourself:

- Make sure you eat a healthy balanced diet and drink plenty of water
- Get some exercise – take a walk with a friend
- Ensure that you get enough sleep
- Make sure you do something you enjoy every day even if it is only for 15 minutes
- Keep in touch with your friends and socialise
- Organise some respite care for your loved one to give you both a break.

There are a number of people and organisations that can provide you with more information and support.

Social workers – talk to your loved one's social worker if they have one

Cancer Council – call 13 11 20

Carers Australia – call 1800 242 636 or visit www.carersaustralia.com.au

Make sure you look after yourself. Take some time just for you.

Who can I contact for more support & information?

Both Kidney Health Australia and the Cancer Council offer a free and confidential service for further support and information.

Kidney Health Australia Cancer Support & Information Service
Kidney Health Australia provides support and information for kidney cancer patients, their families and carers in a variety of different ways.

Free call: **1800 454 363**
kidneycancer@kidney.org.au
kidneycancer.org.au
forum.kidney.org.au



Cancer Council offers reliable cancer information and support to anyone affected by cancer, including patients, carers, families, friends, and healthcare professionals. They can connect you with others who have been through a similar experience and link you to practical, emotional and financial support in your area.

Free call: **13 11 20**
cancer.org.au



For more information about kidney or urinary health, please contact our free call Kidney Health Information Service (KHIS) on 1800 454 363.

Or visit our website **kidney.org.au** to access free health literature.

This is intended as a general introduction to this topic and is not meant to substitute for your doctor's or healthcare professional's advice. All care is taken to ensure that the information is relevant to the reader and applicable to each state in Australia. It should be noted that Kidney Health Australia recognises that each person's experience is individual and that variations do occur in treatment and management due to personal circumstances, the healthcare professional and the state one lives in. Should you require further information always consult your doctor or healthcare professional.



If you have a **hearing or speech impairment**, contact the National Relay Service on **1800 555 677** or **relayservice.com.au**

For all types of services ask for 1800 454 363