What You Should Know About the Stages of Kidney Cancer

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What Are the Stages of Kidney Cancer?

Health professionals use stages of cancer to determine the severity of a patient's health condition. In kidney cancer, the TNM system is used. It is the abbreviation for *tumor (T), node (N),* and *metastasis (M).* Specialists look at the three factors mentioned to determine the stage of the cancer.

The TNM System

- **Tumor.** The “T” is used in combination with a number (0 to 4) to describe the location and size of the tumor. It gets more complicated as this category is further divided into smaller groups to describe the tumor description even further. Having detailed information like this helps the doctor know the best course of treatment for the patient.
- **Node.** The “N” stands for *lymph nodes*. The lymph nodes near the kidneys are regional lymph nodes and the ones in other parts of the body further from the kidneys are referred to as distant lymph nodes.
- **Distant metastasis.**The "M" stands for the metastasis of the cancer and has it spread to the other parts of the body such as the bones, liver, brain, and distant lymph nodes.

Stages of Kidney Cancer

The cancer will be staged and combined with the TNM classifications to describe the cancer further:

Stage I: This indicates that the kidney has a tumor of 7 cm or smaller and is located in the kidney only. The stage grouping will generally look like this – (T1, N0, M0).

Stage II: If the tumor is stage II, it will be larger than 7 cm, but still in the kidney and will not have spread to lymph nodes or organs further from it. The stage grouping will look similar to this – (T2, N0, M0).

Stage III: Stage III can look like either of these scenarios:

- The tumor may be any size that is in the kidney, but has spread only to the regional lymph nodes. Staging will look like this – (T1, T2; N1; M0)
- The tumor has spread into the nearby major vein or outer lying tissue of the kidney; it may or may not have spread to nearby lymph nodes. It has not gone into distant organs.

Stage IV: May be any of the two conditions below:

- The tumor has spread to areas into the adrenal gland near kidney; possible lymph node involvement but has not entered other parts of the body. The staging may look like – (T4; any N; M0).
- The tumor has metastasized to other organs of the body.

How Can Kidney Cancer be Prevented?

Anyone can get kidney cancer because of forces beyond their control. However, there are many lifestyle choices that can influence whether we put ourselves at risk to increase the chances of getting this type of cancer. Below are some lifestyle changes you may want to consider to reduce your risk of kidney cancer:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Exercise regularly
- Quit smoking or using tobacco
- Control your blood pressure
- Avoid exposure to toxic chemicals
- Know your family history