How to Live Your Best Life With One Kidney After Cancer

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Tips for Living With One Kidney After Cancer

Many people are living normal and healthy lives with one kidney after kidney cancer. It's important, however, that you stay as healthy as possible so you protect your only kidney.

Since your one kidney is doing the work of two kidneys, here are some things to consider:

What Is Different When Living With One Kidney After Cancer?

Your single kidney will have to provide 75 percent of normal kidney functions, rather than the 50 percent it did previously. You likely will not have kidney problems, especially in the first few years after kidney removal.

Having one kidney does not affect the length of your life nor does it affect the type of life you will have. In fact, your life can still be pretty normal.

Potential Long-Term Problems With One Kidney

You may develop high blood pressure (BP) after kidney removal but your BP can be managed with proper diet and medication. You should also limit your sodium intake and not smoke.

Also, you will want to monitor your blood pressure at home because a consistently high BP could potentially damage your healthy kidney. Notify your doctor if your BP continues to stay over 140/90.

Although rare, a hernia can occur at the incision site used for removing your kidney. This may occur as you are healing and or it may show up later.

Living With One Kidney Diet: Changes in Nutrition and Diet

You do not have to follow a special diet, but you should eat sensibly. Make healthy choices, including eating fruits and veggies, lean meats, grains, and low-fat dairy.

You should limit your sodium intake to keep your blood pressure stable. Read food labels and try to limit your sodium intake to around 1,500 milligrams per day, as recommended by the American Heart and Stroke Associations.

You should also limit alcohol and caffeine. Stay hydrated especially when out in the sun, during hot weather, and if you are exercising.

A low protein diet is a must, as protein breaks into waste materials that your kidneys must remove and excessive protein forces your kidneys to work harder. A dietitian can help you if you are struggling to maintain a low protein

diet or a healthy diet.

Medications and Your Kidney

This goes without saying, but it is important to avoid recreational drug use. You should use only the medications prescribed by your doctor.

Even over-the-counter medications, including NSAIDs and aspirin, could be toxic to your single kidney. And some prescriptions, including antibiotics, are too, so make sure you let every doctor you see know you are living with only one kidney.

Yearly Doctor Checkups

While living with one kidney after cancer, you should have yearly checkups that include blood pressure monitoring and protein urine level and waste filtration testing.

According to the Mayo Clinic, high protein levels in urine might indicate sluggish kidney function and damage. The filtration rate test is a blood test that shows your doctor how efficiently your kidney is filtering waste.

How to Avoid Kidney Injuries

It is suggested people with one kidney avoid aggressive activity, including sports where the chance of heavy contact and injury is high. If you are going to participate in sports, it is important to protect your kidney by being especially careful and wearing padding.

While there might be some concern, the University of Virginia School of Medicine says the risk of damage to the kidneys with contact sports is extremely small. Other activities such as horseback riding and skiing are riskier than football or soccer.

You should consider the risks of activity and decide whether the benefits will outweigh the risks. After all, you will need to stay active but you will have to decide how you can do that safely.

Imaging Tests Precautions

You should speak up before undergoing any imaging tests and let the imaging technician know you living with one kidney after cancer. Sometimes, the injection of contrast dyes may cause an allergic reaction or infection, or affect your kidney function.

You should drink plenty of water before any testing. You may also need to stop taking certain medications beforehand so make sure you ask plenty of questions before undergoing any imaging.

What if Your Lone Kidney Fails?

The following symptoms may occur if your kidney fails:

- Decrease in urine production and output
- Body swelling
- Concentration problems and confusion
- Fatigue and lethargy
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea and abdominal pain
- Metallic taste in the mouth

If you are experiencing one or more of these symptoms, you should call your doctor. Even if your lone kidney

fails, you still have two options: dialysis and a kidney transplant.

You and your doctor can decide the best options should your kidney fail, but in the meantime, you should focus on taking care of your lone kidney and keeping it healthy.

Finding Support After a Kidney Removal

If you are struggling to do this alone and dealing with the impact of living with one kidney after cancer, you should reach out to loved ones or a mental health professional.

You may also want to talk to your hospital's social worker right after your kidney removal. That person can also provide you with information about support groups in your area.

The Bottom Line...

Living with one kidney after cancer won't necessarily unroot your life. Your remaining kidney is able to compensate for the missing one so you should expect to have a healthy life with one kidney.

As long as you are making wise diet choices, getting plenty of exercise, monitoring blood pressure, visiting your doctor regularly, watching your OTC medication intake, and avoiding injury, you can lead a pretty healthy life with one kidney. And even if your sole kidney were to fail, you still have treatment options.