How to Cope and Manage Kidney Cancer Pain

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Managing Kidney Cancer Pain

Pain is a big problem for people with kidney cancer, especially if the cancer is an advanced stage and has spread to nearby organs or the bones.

Up to 80 percent of advanced cancer patients experience pain, according to one report from the Cleveland Clinic.

Another study published in *The International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine* finds up to 50 percent of people continue to experience pain, resulting in functional limitations, even years after cancer treatment has ended.

Cancer pain and post-cancer pain can be moderate to severe and affect your ability to participate in daily activities and your overall quality of life.

Sources of Kidney Cancer Pain

If you experience pain on one side of the body between the upper abdomen and back, this is called “flank pain,” coming from your kidney, likely from a tumor pressing on the organ. You may also experience pain if the tumor has grown and is pressing on nearby organs or nerves.

Pain is one of the many side effects of kidney cancer treatments. Radiation therapy may cause burning sensations or painful scars, and chemotherapy has been known for causing mouth sores and nerve damage.

Postoperative pain, if you have had surgery to remove tumors or a kidney, can also compromise your life quality.

If your kidney cancer has spread to your bones, it is called bone metastasis. This condition may cause excruciating pain and may even cause your bones to break.

About one-third of people with kidney cancer eventually develop bone metastasis, according to one 2016 report from the *International Journal of Molecular Studies*.

Kidney Cancer Pain Management Options

Cancer pain is treatable, and the majority of patients get relief using different therapies or a combination. One way to manage pain is to eliminate the source, and another is through treatments to control the pain.

Medication

Pain medicine can help to manage and treat pain. Your doctor may want you to start with over-the-counter medications and prescription strength pain relievers.

The next medicinal option is a weak opioid, such as codeine. Your doctor may consider prescribing strong opioids, such as morphine, oxycodone, and methadone if your pain levels are severe and no other medications are helping to manage your pain or give you pain relief.

Pain medications can be taken with oral tablets, or if you are unable to take oral capsules, they can be administered intravenously or with a pain patch.

It is important to note pain medications may cause the following side effects:

- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Sleepiness
- Confusion
- The possibility of addiction.

You and your doctor will have to decide whether the benefits of taking pain medication outweigh the risk of side effects, including long-term ones.

Nerve Blocks

Nerve blocks are a specialized treatment where a local anesthetic is injected in or around a nerve. These injections prevent pain signals in the affected nerves from traveling to the brain and sending pain messages.

Bisphosphonates

If you have bone metastasis, it can create holes in your bones called osteolytic lesions. Medications called bisphosphonates can prevent new lesions and minimize some of your bone pain.

Bisphosphonates can be given orally or intravenously. The side effects of these include flu-like symptoms, nausea, and low calcium levels.

Electrical Nerve Stimulation

Electrical nerve stimulation may temporarily help with pain in one area of the body. Unfortunately, there aren’t enough research studies to confirm how effective electrical nerve stimulation is in treating cancer pain.

Electrical nerve stimulation involves the use of small sticky pads placed on the skin that release small electrical charges. By stimulating the nerves running from the spine to the brain until pain signals are blocked.

There are few side effects with this therapy, so it may be worth asking your doctor if this is an option for you.

Acupuncture

There isn’t enough evidence confirming acupuncture works to relieve kidney cancer pain but some studies show it can reduce muscle and bone pain.

Acupuncture works by helping the body release pain-relieving chemicals, and some studies have reported it can promote a stronger sense of well-being and decrease overall feelings of sickness associated with cancer and chronic diseases.

Additional Ways to Manage Kidney Cancer Pain

Some other ways to help you to have some control over your pain include:

- Managing stress.

- Getting good quality sleep.
- Relaxation, including the use of calming music and guided imagery.
- Deep breathing when you are feeling stressed and tense.
- Massage and other complementary therapies, such as aromatherapy, hypnotherapy, and reflexology.
- Talking to someone about your pain can relieve stress and help you to better cope.

Consider Your Unique Needs

Your cancer pain is unique which is why you and your doctor will need to take an individual approach to treating it.

However, your doctor cannot help if he or she doesn't know how much pain you are in and how it is affecting you on a daily basis. Speak up and don't delay in getting help for pain resulting from living with and treating your kidney cancer.