Why Do People Who Have Kidney Cancer Get Edema?

by PATRICIA BRATIANU

What Causes Swelling in Cancer Patients?

If you have kidney cancer, you may experience swollen tissues from an accumulation of fluid in your body. This condition is called edema. Edema may occur anyplace in your body. Fluid is most likely to build up in your legs, feet, lower back, hands, edema of your scrotum may develop, if you are a man.

Fluid accumulation may occur inside your body too. Fluid buildup in your lungs is known as pulmonary edema. Swelling and buildup of fluids in the heart may result in pericarditis or congestive heart failure.

Both of these conditions are potentially serious. You may have fluid buildup in one area or throughout your body. Generalized edema is a term which describes fluid buildup within your entire body.

Management of Edema

Management is complicated because edema impacts many systems of your body. A comprehensive treatment plan which incorporates the use of medication, dietary approaches, and strategies for daily living is usually required to minimize or eliminate fluid build-up successfully.

Consult with your health care providers to ensure that you have access to the most effective treatments which are available to prevent and reduce edema. By combining medical interventions with steps which you take at home, you will minimize fluid buildup and reduce the risk of complications caused by edema.

If you experience chest pain, a sudden increase in edema, or shortness of breath, seek medical attention without delay.

Why Do People Who Have Kidney Cancer Get Edema?

Your kidneys produce the hormone, aldosterone. Aldosterone plays a critical role in maintaining the fluid balance within your entire body.

When cancer occurs, cancerous tissue replaces and destroys healthy tissues within your kidneys. The delicate balance of hormones which balance fluid levels is interrupted.

Aldosterone helps your body to reabsorb sodium within your kidneys while they filter out impurities from your system. When your body reabsorbs sodium, it reabsorbs water simultaneously.

Kidney cancer symptoms include a reduction of kidney function causing fluids to be reabsorbed inefficiently. As a result, fluids build up in your tissues, sodium, and potassium levels are disturbed too.

Dietary Approaches for Managing Edema

Check with your healthcare provider for specific recommendations. Here are some tips which may be beneficial for you. The actions which you take depend upon the stage of your illness, and any other underlying health challenges which you are facing.

- **Carefully read product labels.** Choose sodium free or reduced sodium products. Avoid products which contain the terms “sodium, sodium chloride, salt, or sea salt.”
- **Consider using a salt substitute if your health care provider agrees.** Salt substitutes may be seasoning mixes that contain herbs and spices, or they may be made of a sodium reduced compound which contains potassium chloride. The “light “salts may be used just like table salt in recipes and at the table. Most people cannot tell the difference between regular salt and light salt unless large amounts of the “light “salt are used.
- **Snack on unsalted chips and other snacks instead of salty foods.** If you are longing for a crunchy food; try nibbling on raw fruits and vegetables. Dehydrated fruits and vegetables are healthy options as well. Their concentrated flavors may reduce cravings for salt. Dressings made of lemon juice or vinegar may help to diminish cravings for salt, too. Try malt vinegar on French fries. You will be able to eliminate salt and ketchup, which contains substantial amounts of salt.
- **Ask your health care provider for a referral to a dietitian.** Learn what foods you should eat regularly, those which are suitable for occasional use, and foods which you should avoid. Make efforts to stay within the levels of sodium, potassium, protein, and fluid that the dietitian recommends.
- **If you plan to use herbal or other complementary therapies for health; consult an herbalist or other qualified alternative health care practitioner.** Herbs and other supplements are available which support kidney function, improve elimination of fluids, provide nutritional support, and benefit your entire body. Be sure that all health prescribers are aware of all herbs, medications, and supplements that you take.
- **Learn whether or not your health care provider wants you to restrict your fluid intake.**
- **Avoid carbonated beverages, such as soda and beer, as they contain sodium.** Tomato and vegetable juices are high in sodium; however low sodium varieties are easily obtained. For maximum nutritional benefits and taste, make your own fresh juices.
- **Eat a low sodium diet.** Ask your health care provider if there is a specific limit of the amount of sodium that you should not exceed. Many people who have kidney cancer must limit their salt intake to between 250-500 mg. per day.
- **Be aware that most of the salt we eat comes from packaged and processed foods; not from salt that we add at the table.** Baking soda, baking powder, smoked meats, pickles, bread, and condiments contain high levels of hidden sodium.

Managing Edema at Home

Here are some tips which you can use at home to prevent and manage edema.

- Alternate periods of activity with rest. Change your position frequently. Elevate your legs when you are sitting.
- If a substantial amount of fluid accumulation occurs; your health care provider may recommend a short period of bed rest. Bed rest may help your to body get rid of excess fluids temporarily.
- Take your medications as prescribed. Diuretics and potassium supplements may be needed. You may require medications to treat other health issues caused by the accumulation of fluids. Get diagnostic tests as recommended by your physician so that medications are prescribed in the proper dosages.
- Elevate parts of the body that are edematous.
- If your skin is weeping; use reusable or disposable pads to absorb fluids.

What Kinds of Medications are Used Manage Edema?

Several medications are used to help manage edema. Here are some of the most commonly prescribed drugs.

- Diuretics are the most commonly prescribed medications used to help your body get rid of excess fluids.
- You may have an imbalance of potassium. Most diuretics cause potassium loss. Your health care

practitioner may prescribe potassium supplements.
- If you have difficulty breathing due to congestive heart failure or pulmonary edema, your health care provider may prescribe medications to open up your airways. Medications which reduce the oxygen requirements of the heart and lungs, such as cardiac drugs may be used.
- Having excess fluid is uncomfortable. Your sleep may be impaired, and you may feel anxious. This is especially common if the fluid is making it hard to breathe. Sedatives may be prescribed that reduce your anxiety and promote sleep.
- Narcotics may be ordered to provide pain relief associated with edema. Some drugs open up airways and facilitate comfort if breathing is labored.
- Itchy, tense, weepy skin may occur when edema is present. Topical and internal medicines may provide relief of the itchiness.
- Oxygen may be employed to make you feel comfortable, and decrease physical stress on your body. Oxygen is most commonly used if edema occurs in the chest, the abdomen, or is generalized.

Kidney Cancer and Edema: The Bottom Line

Management of edema can be challenging. Fortunately, many interventions may be employed to prevent and decrease edema.

Educate yourself about kidney cancer and edema. That way you will be assured that everything is being done to limit edema. Use every available resource to maintain an optimal level of wellness and meaningful life despite the challenges kidney cancer and edema present.