

Nephrectomy

SUNA Postoperative Care Task Force

Overview

A nephrectomy is a procedure to remove a kidney. This is done when one of your kidneys is not working properly or if there is a tumor. You can live a normal, healthy life with one kidney.

Indications

A nephrectomy is performed to treat kidney cancer or to remove a non-cancerous (benign) tumor. A nephrectomy is also performed to treat an abnormal or seriously damaged kidney. In the case of a donor nephrectomy, the surgeon removes a healthy kidney from a person donating a kidney to be put into (transplanted) a person who needs a healthy kidney.

What to Expect Before the Procedure

- You may need to have lab tests, X-rays, and electrocardiograms (EKGs) done before your procedure, if ordered by your provider.
- You may be asked to attend a clinic visit before the procedure for an exam and review of test results.
- Stop eating 8 hours before the procedure.

What to Expect After the Procedure

Medication: You may be given a prescription for narcotic pain medication. Take only as instructed.

Diet: You may continue your normal diet. It may take several weeks for your normal desire to eat to return. Drink plenty of water. Avoid constipation. Eat foods higher in fiber.

Constipation prevention: Use laxatives, stool softeners, suppositories, and enemas as directed by your provider.

Wound care: Keep your wound clean and dry. You may shower. Wash your incision gently with soap and water, and pat it dry. Do not take baths or swim until you are told by your health care clinic.

Activity: Do not drive until you are pain free and off your pain medication. Increase your activity slowly. Do not lift anything heavier than 10 pounds for 6 weeks. Do not worry if you feel more tired than normal. Fatigue and weakness are common for a few weeks after surgery.

Complication and Call the Clinic If You Experience:

- Fever of 101 degrees F or higher.
- Redness, swelling, and/or warmth at the incision site.
- Drainage or pus coming from your incision.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Increased pain that is not helped by your pain medication.
- Decrease in urine output.
- Blood in your urine.

**If you cannot reach the clinic and are in need of urgent assistance, please proceed to the nearest Emergency Department.

Resources

- American Urological Association. (2017). *Renal mass & localized renal cancer: AUA guideline*. <https://www.auanet.org/guidelines/guidelines/renal-cancer-renal-mass-and-localized-renal-cancer-guideline>
- Liu, G., Ma, Y., Wang, S., Han, X., & Gao, D. (2017). Laparoscopic versus open Radical Nephrectomy for renal Cell Carcinoma: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Translational Oncology, 10*(4), 501-510. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tranon.2017.03.004>
- Urology Care Foundation. (n.d.). *What is kidney cancer*. <https://www.urologyhealth.org/urology-a-z/k/kidney-cancer#Treatment>

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We hope you and all your family members may benefit from these handouts.

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