

ANATOMY LESSON KIDNEY CANCER & KIDNEY CYSTS

Your Incredible Kidneys!

The kidneys are a pair of organs that sit in your abdomen, toward your back. Each is the shape and color of a kidney bean (hence the name of that legume), but about the size of a fist.

These organs are incredible workhorses, regulating blood pressure, producing red blood cells, activating vitamin D, producing glucose, and filtering and regulating body fluids. Plus, they filter the blood thereby producing waste in the form of urine that passes out of the kidneys, down the ureters, and into the bladder.

If necessary, we can get by on about one-third of one kidney, which can increase its capacity to do the extra labor. It's a lot of labor—all the blood in the body passes through the kidneys about 20 times an hour!



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ANNOTATION

RENAL ARTERY

These carry blood into the kidneys.

RENAL VEIN

These carry away purified blood.

URETER

Urine passes down these to the bladder.

RENAL CORTEX

The outer portion of the kidney where ultrafiltration occurs.

RENAL MEDULLA

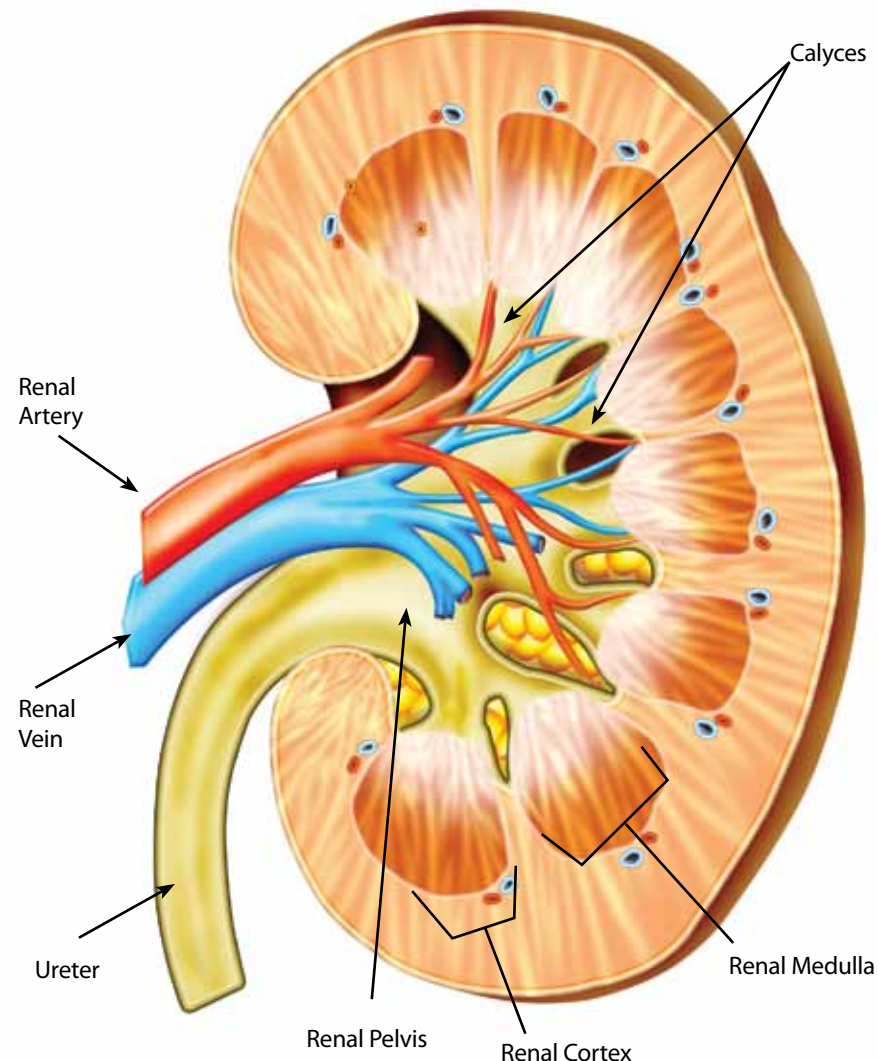
The innermost portion that maintains the blood's salt balance.

CALYCES

These collect urine and pass it onto the renal pelvis.

RENAL PELVIS

Urine collects here before entering the ureters.



What Is Kidney Cancer?

The most common form of kidney cancer is renal cell carcinoma (RCC), which can form in small tubes that filter blood and remove waste.

For those diagnosed with RCC, treatment is of utmost importance, and surgical removal of the tumor is the primary therapy for this cancer. Depending upon the size and the location of the tumor, surgeons will perform a partial nephrectomy (removing just the tumor) or a radical nephrectomy (removing the entire kidney).

Both surgeries are typically done in a minimally invasive way through the use of laparoscopy and robotics. But even in advanced disease, many new therapies have emerged that are prolonging patients' quality and quantity of life.

Catching RCC early is important, so if you have any of its common symptoms, you should tell your doctor. The symptoms can appear similar to those of other urinary diseases, so it is important that a urologist determine what the underlying cause might be.

Kidney Cysts

Kidney cysts, on the other hand, are quite common and usually are benign. They are fluid filled cavities that a doctor will monitor over time using radiography to make sure the cysts are stable.

Most times a cyst will be benign, but they can grow quite large and produce localized pain. If symptoms associated with a large cyst occur, the fluid can be drained out of it. Occasionally, cysts can be found—via a CAT scan—to harbor a high likelihood that cancer will develop in them, and in these cases, the cyst will be surgically removed.

Common symptoms of RCC include:

- ▶ Blood in your urine
- ▶ Pain in your side that doesn't go away
- ▶ A lump or mass in your side or abdomen
- ▶ Weight loss for no known reason
- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Tiredness & lethargy

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