

# Wilms' Tumour – the basics

**Disclaimer:** This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

This information sheet will tell you in simple terms:

- What is Wilms' Tumour?
- Why did the Wilms' Tumour happen?
- What problems does a Wilms' Tumour cause?
- How did we find the Wilms' Tumour?
- How do we treat Wilms' Tumour?

## What is a Wilms' Tumour?

A **Wilms' Tumour** is a type of cancer - a lump of cells (tumour) which should not be there. Wilms' Tumour is also known as a **nephroblastoma**. It is a cancer that only children get. It starts in the kidney from primitive (very simple) kidney cells. It is named after a Dr Wilms, who was a surgeon who treated this type of cancer.

## Why did the Wilms' Tumour happen?

In most cases, we do not know why children get this type of cancer. In some children, there are a few rare inherited syndromes which increase the risk of getting a Wilms' Tumour. Some children have Wilms' tumours in both kidneys.

## What problems do Wilms' Tumours cause?

With a Wilms' Tumour, the problems depend on where the cancer is and how big it is. Often, there is a **lump** in the abdomen which can be seen or felt. Some children lose their appetite and start to **lose weight**. They may complain of **pain** in their abdomen or back. In some cases, the cancer causes **high blood pressure** or some blood in the urine. The Wilms' Tumour cancer cells may spread to other areas of the body and cause problems there.

## How did we find the Wilms' Tumour?

You or your doctor may have noticed a lump, or been concerned about your child. Usually a scan or an X-ray shows that there is a lump which should not be there.

## How do we treat Wilms' Tumours?

The treatment of each person with a Wilms' Tumour is different. In most cases, a **paediatric oncologist** (a doctor who treats children with cancer) will develop the best treatment for your child, together with other specialists. These may be:

- a **paediatric surgeon** (a surgeon who operates on children)
- a **radiation oncologist** (a doctor who uses radiation therapy to treat cancer).

Your oncologist is: \_\_\_\_\_

Your surgeon is: \_\_\_\_\_

Your radiation oncologist is: \_\_\_\_\_

In the first days, many **scans** will be done to find exactly **where** the cancer is, usually a CAT scan, an ultrasound, and some nuclear medicine scans (bone scan, gallium scan). Some **blood tests** will also be done. These tests allow us to find exactly where the Wilms' tumour is, and whether it has spread to other areas in the body.

Sometimes, the surgeon will perform a small operation (a **biopsy**) to take out a small piece of the Wilms' Tumour so that the exact type of the cancer is known. This helps in planning the best treatment.

There are three main ways to treat Wilms' Tumour cancers. These are:

- use of drugs which kill cancer cells (**chemotherapy**)
- removal of some or all of the lump with an **operation**
- use of radiation to kill the cancer cells (**radiotherapy**)

Depending on the type of tumour and where it is, some or all of these ways will be used to treat the cancer. In general, most children have some chemotherapy treatment, followed by an operation.

Your specialists will talk to you about the best way to treat **your** child.

Any questions about this information may be directed to the Oncology Treatment Centre on 9845 2115 (8am-4pm) or Camperdown ward on 9845 1123. Further sheets are available from the Oncology staff or The Children's Hospital at Westmead's website at [www.chw.edu.au](http://www.chw.edu.au). Updated **April 2003**.

**the children's hospital at Westmead**