

Jeff Kallis' kidney cancer prompted questions. He wants to help others find answers

Earlier this year, a Mayo Clinic retiree created KidneyCouch, an online resource for those with kidney cancer or chronic kidney disease.



Jeff Kallis, a local kidney cancer survivor who created an online resource, KidneyCouch, for others with kidney cancer or chronic kidney disease, is pictured on Friday, Aug. 29, 2025, at his home in Rochester.

Maya Giron / Post Bulletin

ROCHESTER — During his nearly four-decade career in administration at Mayo Clinic, Jeff Kallis found himself drawn to data, automation, and information technology-adjacent projects.

So, when Kallis, now retired, received a kidney cancer diagnosis in early 2023, he turned to journaling, writing about each step of his cancer journey.

"I'm a data freak," Kallis said. "I love data and logic, so I started writing things down."

He turned those journal entries into a [self-published book](#), "One Kidney: Dealing with Kidney Cancer." It was a therapeutic process, Kallis said — he logged the analytical details, like his lab tests, the answers to his questions and the emotional toll.

"It finally hit me. I had cancer," Kallis wrote. "It took me just over three months for reality to come crashing down on me. I had thrown myself into digging into the details of what I was up against and by doing so, I hadn't allowed time to just stop and really think."

After publishing "One Kidney," helping himself heal, Kallis wanted to help others in the same boat. So, earlier this year, he launched KidneyCouch, an [online one-stop shop](#) for information on kidney cancer and chronic kidney disease, or CKD. A place to find reputable answers to sometimes overwhelming questions.

The name stems from the idea of people having a conversation while sitting on a couch, Kallis said. The website's logo, two curved shapes that could be kidneys or couches, is orange and green, the awareness colors for kidney cancer and CKD.

"It isn't a business; I'm not out to raise money," Kallis said. "I just want this to be a library, a place where kidney cancer patients can come and learn more about their disease and prognosis."

The website features a library of informational webpages, from kidney cancer stages to biopsies. There are also referrals to one-on-one support services, U.S. News' Best Hospitals list, mental health resources and kidney-friendly diet guides — all vetted by Kallis.

There's a lot of information out there, but there's a lot of sources that are just bad," Kallis said. "You know the trusted sources — you go to Mayo Clinic, MD Anderson, Sloan Kettering, the best of the best. And you stay away from Facebook."

Creating KidneyCouch was a "natural progression," Kallis said, of his tech interests.

"I just like to automate things," he said. "I love websites. I love interactive ones that are friendly and fun."

The inclusion of CKD information stems from Kallis' experience, too. The story begins in January 2023, when he went to his doctor with left-side back pain. His doctor suspected a kidney stone and ordered a CT scan to get a better look.

"On the left-hand side, I was passing a kidney stone," Kallis said of the scan. "On the right side, unexpectedly, they found a five-centimeter mass ... that was later diagnosed to be kidney cancer."

To treat his cancer, Kallis had a right-side radical nephrectomy surgery, removal of the whole right kidney that February. Since then, he's been cancer-free. But post-operative labs revealed that Kallis' remaining kidney was working, but not as well as it could. He was diagnosed with CKD.

"So, I have to really watch my diet, Mediterranean diet, (be) more active and go for walks," Kallis said.

KidneyCouch's next steps, Kallis said, are to partner with organizations like the Kidney Cancer Association and Imerman Angels, an organization that pairs mentors with cancer patients and caregivers. Kallis is already a mentor with that group.

"Having that dialogue one-on-one with a person who's actually gone through it, you can ask questions that you wouldn't ask of somebody else," Kallis said. "A lot of it is the social aspect, the emotional aspect of it."



By Dené K. Dryden

September 5, 2025 at 6:45 AM