

## Kidney Disease: Kidney Transplants

Once you have kidney failure, you will need to have dialysis or get a new kidney. If you have a kidney transplant, a donated kidney will take over the work of filtering your blood.

Kidney transplant may be the best choice if you are otherwise in good health. You will be able to live a more normal life. But kidney transplant is complex, and it does have risks.

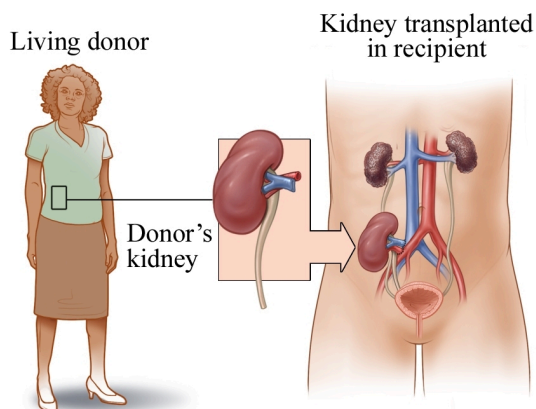
This information can help you understand how kidney transplant works. Knowing what to expect can help you make the best decisions.

### Getting ready for a kidney transplant

Your doctor can refer you to a transplant center. The doctors, nurses, and social workers at the transplant center will weigh many factors to see if transplant is a good choice for you.

The transplant team will:

- Talk to you. The team will want to know if you are willing to follow your treatment exactly to help make the transplant a success. They will see how well you are following your dialysis schedule and how faithfully you take your medicines.
- Look at your overall health. You probably are not a good candidate for transplant if you have an active infection, unstable heart disease or another serious illness, or a substance use disorder.
- Do blood and tissue tests. These test results can help to match you with a donor. The more matches you have with the donor, the more likely it is that your body will accept the donor kidney.



- Help you find ways to pay for your transplant and follow-up care. Medicare may cover a large part of these costs. Your social worker can answer questions about Medicare and insurance coverage.

### Finding a kidney donor

There are two basic types of kidney donors:

- A **living donor** may be a family member, a friend, a coworker, or any person who is willing to give a kidney to someone in need. A person only needs one healthy kidney to live.
- A **cadaver donor** is someone who has recently died. Most donor kidneys come from this source. You will need to be on a waiting list for this kind of donor kidney.

In both cases, your doctor will try to find a donor kidney with the closest possible blood and tissue match. A family member is not always the best match.

## Getting a new kidney

During a kidney transplant, a surgeon places a donated kidney in your belly. The surgeon connects the blood vessels of the new kidney to your blood vessels. The surgery takes 3 or 4 hours. Unless they are causing problems, your own kidneys will not be taken out.

You will need to stay in the hospital about a week. Your new kidney may start working in a short time, or it may not begin to work well for a few weeks. You will need to have dialysis until the new kidney is able to take over.

## What to expect after a kidney transplant

You may feel stronger and healthier right away. Many people say they feel better than they have in years. But getting a new kidney does not mean your treatment is over.

Transplant creates a new problem called organ rejection. Rejection is nature's way of protecting your body. Your immune system sees the new kidney as a foreign substance, so it tries to attack the kidney. For as long as you have your new kidney, you will need to take antirejection medicines.

Antirejection medicines save your life by keeping your body from rejecting the new kidney. But they weaken your immune system, so they make it harder for your body to fight disease. They increase your risk for serious infections and cancer. You and your transplant team will need to watch for these

and other side effects.

It is important to take these medicines exactly as prescribed. You will have to take a large number of medicines in the weeks and months following your surgery. Over time, you may need fewer. Call your doctor if you think you are having a problem with your medicine.

## Pros and cons of kidney transplant

If you are a candidate for a kidney transplant, it can help to weigh the pros and cons.

On the plus side:

- You will probably feel better and have more energy than you do on dialysis.
- You will not need dialysis anymore.
- You may be able to return to a normal work and social life.
- On average, you will live longer than if you stay on dialysis.

On the minus side:

- It may be hard to find a good match for your blood and tissue types. Even then, your body could reject the new kidney.
- You will have to take antirejection medicines for the rest of your life.
- As with any surgery, there is a risk that you might have problems or might not survive a transplant.

**Do you have any questions or concerns after reading this information?** It's a good idea to write them down and take them to your next doctor visit.