

# Having a Kidney Transplant



Having a kidney transplant is a big undertaking. This booklet is designed to help you and your family understand what you need to know about kidney transplants- from being in hospital for the operation, learning all about the medicines you will need and what happens when you go home.

It aims to answer some of the questions you and your family may have, and hopefully ease some of your fears. This should help you to take good care of yourself and your new kidney so that you can lead a full, happy and healthy life.



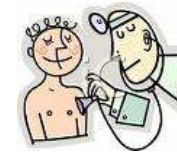
# What happens in Hospital?



In the weeks before being admitted to hospital for your transplant you will have a number of tests and investigations. These are to make sure that your new kidney will be suitable for you and that you are well enough to have the operation. The person donating their kidney to you will have these tests too. This section covers what happens next.

## Before your operation

You should be admitted to hospital on the day before your operation so the doctors can examine you and find out all the information needed about your illness and overall health. The nurse will also ask you and your parents' lots of questions.



You will need to have a few final tests including:

- blood tests
- urine tests
- weight and height checks
- blood pressure, heart rate, breathing and temperature checks

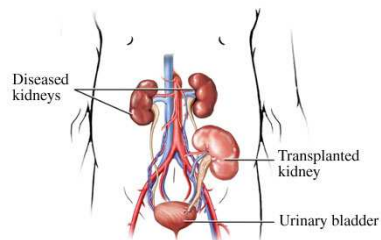
If you have dialysis treatment you may need to continue with this on the day before surgery. You will not be able to eat or drink anything for a few hours before your operation so you may need to have fluids given via a drip. You will also be given medication to take to stop you rejecting your new kidney.

Before you go down to the operating theatre you need to have a bath and will be given a special gown to wear. Your donor will be taken to theatre first to have their kidney removed and you will be taken shortly after. At the operating theatre you will be given medicine either via a face mask or a drip in your hand to make you go to sleep.



## During the operation

The operation will take a few hours. During this time your new kidney is placed in your groin and connected to your bladder with a network of tubes and blood vessels taken from your old kidneys. Your old kidneys are not removed but will no longer work as they will have no blood supply.



## After your operation

You will wake up in the recovery room and your nurse will come to take you back to the ward. You will have a dressing on your abdomen where your new kidney was inserted and there will be lots of wires, tubes and equipment attached to you. These are to monitor how well your new kidney is working, check your vital signs and give you medication and fluids. You will have:

-IV line to give fluids and medication directly into your bloodstream

-PCA pump so you can give yourself painkilling medicine directly into your bloodstream, or an epidural which gives painkillers through a tube into your back

-Wound drain to collect extra fluid and prevent it building up round your new kidney

-Urine catheter to drain urine from your bladder to help healing and measure output

-Heart rate, blood pressure and breathing monitors



# Pain

It is normal to have some pain after the operation. You can help the nurse understand how much pain you have by using the faces scale below to show how you are feeling. It is very important to tell the nurse if you have any pain.



**Face 0** is very happy because he doesn't hurt at all. **Face 2** hurts just a little bit. **Face 4** hurts a little more. **Face 6** hurts even more. **Face 8** hurts a whole lot. **Face 10** hurts as much as you can imagine although you don't have to be crying to feel this bad.

If you have a PCA machine the nurse will show you how to press a button so you can give yourself painkillers.



You can also have medicine or tablets to help get rid of pain if you need to.

# The days after the operation



All the tubes and equipment you came back from theatre with will be gradually removed over the days after your operation as you get better. The nurses and doctors will be keeping a close eye on you, carrying out lots of observations and tests frequently to check that you are doing well and that your new kidney is working properly. You may not be able to eat until the day after your operation. You should take sips of water before you start eating so you are not sick. It is important for you to eat even if you don't feel hungry as this will help you get better quicker.

The physiotherapist will give you breathing exercises which you need to do regularly to keep your lungs working well.

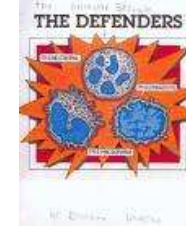
Your nurse will help you to sit out of bed the day after the operation, but you should do as much as you can by yourself. You will be able to sit out for longer and longer each day as you feel stronger. As the monitoring equipment and tubes are removed it will make it easier for you to move around and you can start to take short walks with assistance.

# Your Transplant Medication



You will need to take a variety of medication not only while you are in hospital but also when you leave. Some of these you may already be familiar with and others will be new to you. You may not need to take all of the medicines included in the following pages so don't worry if you don't recognise some of the names. You may also need to take medication which is not covered. Your nurse will explain to you and your family about the all medicines you need to take, how and when you need to take them, and any possible side effects.

## Anti rejection medication



Although your new kidney is carefully matched to you, your body's natural defence system will still recognise it as foreign and attempt to reject it. You will need to take medication for as long as your new kidney is working to help prevent rejection, and it is very important for you to take these medications as directed. Your doctor may need to change your medication from one to another if you experience bad side effects or show signs of rejection.

The most common immunosuppressant medications are:

- Mycophenolate mofetil (cellcept)
- Azathioprine
- Cyclosporin (neoral)
- Tacrolimus
- Prednisolone (a steroid)

Side effects you may experience include

- diarrhoea and vomiting
- increased risk of infection due to low blood counts
- high blood pressure
- excess hair growth

- tingling hands and feet
- abnormal kidney function
- increase in appetite
- stomach irritation.

If you experience very bad side effects and become unwell you may need to return to hospital so the doctors and nurses can help you can better.

If you are taking cyclosporin you need to avoid eating grapefruit and drinking grapefruit juice as these will raise the level of the drug in your blood. You will need to have regular blood tests to monitor levels. Do not take your medicine until after you have had the test as it may affect the result.

## Blood Pressure medication



These drugs help maintain a normal blood pressure. You may be familiar with some of these if you have experienced high blood pressure.

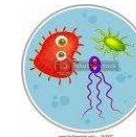
- Nifedipine
- Labetalol
- Atenalol
- Amlodipine
- Enalapril

You may experiences the following side effects -

- drowsiness
- fatigue
- sleeping difficulties
- dizziness
- swelling of hands and feet
- headache
- stomach ache

## Other Medication

### Infection fighting



The anti rejection drugs you need to take reduce your ability to fight infection. You will need to take a number of medications to help prevent different types of infection. These include -

- Cotrimoxazole (antibiotic) - helps fight chest infections
- Acyclovir (antiviral) - prevents the herpes virus which causes chickenpox and shingles
- Amphotericin (antifungal) - prevents fungal infections such as oral thrush

## Antacid



The steroids you need to prevent rejection can cause stomach irritation such as heartburn or stomach ulcers. You will need to take medication to help prevent these. The most common drugs are-

- Ranitidine
- Omeprazole

## Anticoagulant



To prevent blood clots (thrombosis) you will need to take medication to thin your blood. Immediately following your operation you may be given this by injection, although you may need to take oral medication such as aspirin when you leave hospital.

## Going Home



While you are in hospital the nurses and doctors will spend time talking with you and your family about going home. Before you leave you and your family should know everything you need to know about the medication you need to take, and how to take care of yourself and your new kidney. Don't be afraid to ask questions if there is something you don't understand or don't know.

Everyone recovers at a different rate but normally around two weeks after your transplant you should be well enough to go home. You will need to come back to clinic for check ups regularly after you have been discharged. You may need to be readmitted to hospital for a short time if you become unwell.

When you leave hospital you will need to work hard to stay healthy and look after your new kidney. It is important to monitor what you eat and drink. You and your family also need to be aware of the signs of rejection and infection and know what to do if these occur.

## A healthy eating plan

You need to make sure to eat the right kinds of food to help control your weight, encourage healing and care for your new kidney. You should eat plenty of lean meat, poultry, and fish and low-fat dairy products. You should also include a variety of grains, fruits and vegetables to maintain calories, vitamins and minerals.



Your steroid medication will increase your appetite so you may find you are more hungry than usual. Some of the other medications you need to take increase your risk of infection, therefore you or anyone else who is preparing/handling your food need to be very careful. Make sure that food is properly cooked and avoid raw food. Remember you should always wash your hands before handling food and after using the toilet.



## A healthy drinking plan



While you are in hospital the nurse will check how much fluid you drink and how much urine you pass. You need to continue monitoring this when you go home, and should make sure that you drink at least 8 glasses of fluid, preferably water each day. You should weigh yourself every day.

You should inform the hospital straightaway if

- You have rapid weight loss/gain
- You always feel thirsty
- Your skin feels dry
- You feel dizzy or light headed when you stand up
- You stop passing urine

# Looking after yourself



- **Your mouth**

Because your medicines can affect your gums you need to keep your teeth and gums healthy. You should visit your dentist every 6 to 12 months. Tell your dentist about your new kidney and what medicines you are taking. You also need to make sure you tell your dentist if you have a sore mouth, your gums start to bleed, swell or you have ulcers.

- **Your skin**

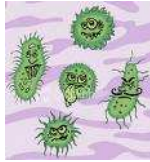
Your wound will be sensitive for some time so wear loose fitting clothing until it is more comfortable. Your skin can become more sensitive now. Examine your skin regularly and if you are concerned that it has changed in any way you should speak to your nurse or doctor. Some medication may cause you to grow more hair on your body and face. If this medicine is reduced, so will the hair growth. There are various ways to remove extra hair if you feel you need to.

- **Your feelings**

In the months following your transplant you may experience mood swings and you may not know whether to laugh or cry sometimes. This can be due to a side effect of medication but can also be for many other reasons. It is completely normal to feel this way. Try to talk your feelings through with your family, but if you find this hard remember that the doctors and nurses at the hospital are all there to talk to and help you with any problems you may have.



# Rejection/Infection



Rejection is the body's immune system recognizing your kidney as foreign and attacking it. It can happen at any time but is most likely to happen in the first three months after transplant and can be treated with medication.

It is very important that you recognize the following signs-

- Weight gain of more than two pounds in one day or four pounds in a week
- Temperature of over 38°C. This could also be a sign of infection
- Tenderness or pain over the transplanted kidney. The kidney may seem swollen or you may feel pain when you press the area
- Decrease in urine output
- Swollen ankles
- Increase in serum creatinine - monitored through blood tests

It is important that you inform the hospital immediately if you notice any of these changes. You will need to have an ultrasound and/or biopsy to confirm rejection and you may also need more frequent blood tests and admission to hospital for observation and treatment.

You will be more at risk of catching infection due to your medication lowering your immune system. Some of the ways of reducing the risks have already been covered. Avoiding large crowds and people with infectious illnesses will also help. You could still develop an infection as your body contains lots of 'good' bugs which may turn 'bad' due to your low immune system. If you experience any of the following symptoms you must contact the hospital straight away so you can be treated-



- Temperature of over 38°C
- Coughing up coloured sputum
- Shortness of breath
- Pain, tenderness or swelling over your scar
- Pain or burning when passing urine
- Cloudy or smelly urine

## Coming back to the clinic

Before you leave hospital you will be given your appointment date and time to come back to clinic. You will also be given telephone numbers of who to contact if you have an emergency.



You need to come back regularly so the doctors and nurses can monitor your condition, and make sure your new kidney is working well. It will also give you and your family the opportunity to ask questions or discuss any problems you may have. Some of the things that happen in clinic include-

- Height, weight and blood pressure checks
- A urine sample taken to check for infection and protein
- Blood tests taken to monitor kidney function, drug levels and general health

## Getting out and about



It is important that you try to get back to your normal activities as soon as possible, such as going back to school and socialising with friends. Some people feel able to do this sooner than others. There is no set time limit. Once you have recovered from your operation you will probably feel better than you have done in a very long time. Have fun and enjoy your new life!

