Kidney Transplant: Am I a Candidate?

Over 17,000 kidney transplants take place in the U.S. each year. However, there are currently over 122,000 people waiting for a new kidney and relying on dialysis while they wait.

If you are interested in having a kidney transplant, you will need to:

• Carefully consider the potential benefits, risks, and complications (see below)
• Qualify medically (see below)
• Understand the transplant process, including donor options, time, and financial requirements (see page 2)

Do I qualify medically?
You MIGHT not be able to have a kidney transplant if you are over 70 or have one of these medical issues:

• Failure of your lungs to work properly
• An organ (other than a kidney) that is not getting necessary blood flow
• Bleeding in your intestinal tract or active peptic ulcer disease (a sore in the stomach lining or upper intestine)
• Disease of the heart or blood vessels
• Abnormal blood clotting
• Birth defects involving organs other than kidneys
• Active cancer
• Severe, permanent brain damage
• An active infection or HIV
• Current alcohol or substance abuse
• Tobacco use (within 3 months before transplant)
• Obesity — a body mass index (or BMI) over 35
• A history of not following doctors’ instructions about your care plan, medications, and keeping appointments
• Uncontrolled or untreated, severe mental health issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential benefits</th>
<th>Risks and potential complications</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Ability to return to near normal health AFTER surgery; no dialysis needed</td>
<td>• Often lengthy wait times for a qualified donor (and being on dialysis while you wait)</td>
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<td>• Better chance of living longer than with ongoing dialysis</td>
<td>• Risks that go with having major surgery</td>
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<td>• Best outcomes (when you have a living donor)</td>
<td>• Costs and side effects of anti-rejection medications you will take for life</td>
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<td>• Surgery covered by Medicare, VA, Medicaid, and most health insurance plans</td>
<td>• High risk of developing skin cancer (65 times more likely than others)</td>
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<td>• Needing blood draws 3 times each week for several weeks</td>
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<td>• Risk of your body rejecting the transplanted kidney and having to go on dialysis</td>
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What is the transplant process?

There are several steps involved in the process that are critical to your transplant success. Understanding these steps will help you determine if a kidney transplant is right for you. The diagram below gives you an at-a-glance look at what to expect. Check the boxes within each phase as you move through the process.

1. **ASK**

   - **Voice a desire**: See a nephrologist to get a referral to a transplant center.
   - **Start the process**: Contact the transplant center and your insurance provider.

2. **QUALIFY**

   - **Medical qualification**: You (and a living donor, if applicable) will have every major system in your body tested (see page 1).
   - **Support qualification**: Team members will verify that you have the needed psychological, social, and financial (see Transplant Costs below) support resources for a successful transplant.

3. **FIND A DONOR**

   - **If you HAVE a living donor**: A healthy family member, friend, or stranger could donate a kidney IF their blood and tissue matches yours and they qualify medically. For you, these transplants can occur quicker and have better outcomes; however, donors face all the risks of having major surgery.
   - **If you DON’T HAVE a living donor**: The transplant center will add your name to the national organ transplant waiting list. It can take months or years to find a match.

4. **PLAN**

   - **If you have to wait for a donor**: Ask your physician what to do to prepare for dialysis, and check your transplant status regularly!
   - **Maintain**: Stay as healthy as possible while you wait.
   - **Think ahead**: Prepare your home for recovery after surgery, and identify caregivers.
   - **Be money smart**: Plan for loss of income, employment, insurance, medical bills, and financial help.

5. **GO FOR IT**

   - **Be ready!** You could get a call any time day or night. Kidneys can only be preserved outside the body for 24 to 48 hours.
   - **Be patient!** There will still be a final evaluation to verify a match once the organ arrives.
   - **Plan for recovery**: Post-surgery hospital stays are 4–8 days for you and 4–5 days for a living donor. You may need to stay close to the transplant center for up to 4 weeks after surgery and come back in 5–6 weeks to have the stent removed.

6. **RECOVER**

   - **Recover**: Plan on staying in the hospital for 4–8 days after surgery (4–5 days for a living donor).
   - **Stick around**: You may be required to remain close to the transplant center for up to 4 weeks if you don’t live nearby.
   - **Follow up**: You will need to have the stent (see page 1 diagram) removed in your urologist’s office 5–6 weeks after surgery.

**Where can I learn more?**

- **Talking About Transplantation** — UNOS booklet (Read and download at: unos.org/wp-content/uploads/unos/WEPNTK.pdf)
- **Intermountain Kidney Transplant Services** (Access information at: intermountainhealthcare.org/services/transplant-services/services/kidney-transplant/)

**Transplant Costs**

What costs insurance companies cover for transplant may vary depending on your insurance and the transplant center you select. Non-covered costs can include candidate testing and evaluation; surgical and other medical costs for a living donor not covered by your insurance; follow-up care and lab tests, anti-rejection medications (these and other medications can easily exceed $10,000 per year); food, lodging, and transportation near a transplant center; and loss of income during the process.

For a complete picture of non-covered expenses, talk with your insurance carrier as well as transplant social workers at_____________________.

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