

What is a Transplant?

A transplant is a surgical procedure where a healthy kidney from a donor is placed into your body. The new kidney will then perform the work of the two failing organs. Dialysis can eliminate waste products and provide a healthy lifestyle, but dialysis alone can't replace the 24/7 functioning of your kidneys and won't stimulate hormones as your own organs would.

Organ transplantation is still a pretty recent development in human history. The first attempts went back as far as the early 1900s, but the successes were short lived. Then in 1954 a team led by Joseph E. Murray at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston performed the first successful kidney transplant between twins^[1]. Using twins as paired donors basically eliminated matching issues and since the body recognized the organ as being similar there wasn't a large immune system response. As time went on, improvements were made in donor matching and immunosuppressant medications (drugs that weaken the immune system response and stop the body from fighting the new organ) became available.

Getting a transplant has many advantages over dialysis including:

- Don't need dialysis treatments.
- Much less food and fluid restrictions.
- Improved quality of life and more independence.
- Potentially increased life span.

Even with modern medical advances, getting a transplant is still a big decision and isn't for everyone. First, it is a surgery and no matter how routine a surgery is, there is always a risk for complications. The surgery itself can be expensive and drugs necessary to keep the kidney after the surgery can also be costly. In addition, there are certain qualifications that need to be met to get on the waiting list. Sharing this information isn't meant to discourage anyone from seeking a transplant, we just want to make sure that all of the information is available and of course your healthcare providers and family will help you make your ultimate decision.

These topics will also be covered in more detail later in the class along with information on preemptive transplantation, sources of donor organs, how to care for your new kidney along with resources for additional information.

Major steps in getting a kidney transplant. These are an approximate order and aren't always the exact stepwise process.

1. Work with your health care team to determine if a transplant is correct for you.
2. If transplant is a good option for you, you will need a referral by your physician to a transplant center (please note some centers don't require a physician referral).
3. At the center, you will learn about the process of getting a transplant, have your physical and mental health evaluated and you will work with a financial expert to determine if you

are a good candidate for transplantation. If so you will be put on the national transplant list.

4. Determine if you will get a kidney from a living or deceased donor.
5. Wait for your surgery date in the case of a living organ donation or wait for an organ to become available and prepare for transplant.
6. Have the surgery and recover.
7. Keep your new organ healthy.

[1] Kidney Transplantation: Past Present and Future. Stanford University. Retrieved from <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/transplant/html/history.html> [1].

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Links

[1] <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/HPS/transplant/html/history.html>