



Frequently Asked Questions about Kidney Transplantation

Patient Information



Working together for better patient information

This leaflet addresses some of the frequently asked questions about kidney transplantation. For more information about the topics covered please visit www.kidneycareuk.org



What is the transplant list?

Patients who are suitable for a transplant and who have completed their assessment tests go on a waiting list. People on this list are waiting for a kidney to be donated by someone who has died ('deceased donor'). There are about 5,000 people waiting for a deceased donor kidney transplant in the UK at the moment.

The transplant waiting list is not a normal list. It is not a case of first come, first served, but rather finding the best match. Children under 18 get top priority so their wait will be shorter. However you become a higher priority the longer you wait.

How do I get on the transplant list?

Talk to your kidney team if you would like to have a kidney transplant. They will discuss what having a transplant involves, making sure it is the right choice for you. Not everyone will be suitable for a transplant. You need to be reasonably healthy to have the operation and for your body to cope with medications to prevent rejection of the new kidney.

You will need to have a number of tests, known as a work-up, to check you are healthy enough to have a transplant and to help match you with the best donor. If your test results show that you are not currently healthy enough for a transplant, your doctor will discuss this with you to see if there is anything you can do to improve your health or whether another form of treatment is more suitable.

You can only join the waiting list if you are within a year of needing dialysis. This is to ensure that you get the most benefit from the transplant and that transplants are allocated to those most in need of them.

If you have been turned down for a transplant you can ask for a second opinion from another doctor.



Is this the only way I can have a kidney transplant?

No, you may also be able to receive a transplant from a friend or relative. This is called living donation. Talk to your kidney team about this or see our leaflet on Living Kidney Donation.

How are donors and recipients matched?

Ideally your blood type should match, just like for a blood transfusion.

Your personal signature (HLA type), which is found on the outside of your white blood cells, should also be reasonably similar but doesn't need to match completely.

When a potential kidney is found, your blood will be tested against the donor's to check that they match and lower the chance of your body rejecting the kidney.



How long will I have to wait for a transplant?

The average waiting time is around 2 – 2.5 years. Some people can be called with an offer within a few days of listing and others have to wait many years

Patients from Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities tend to have to wait longer for a transplant than white patients. This is because organ matching is better when the donor and recipient are from the same ethnic background and only 5% of deceased donors are BAME. It can therefore take longer to find a suitable match.

You may also have to wait longer if you have a rare blood group or if you are sensitised. Sensitisation happens during pregnancies, after having a blood transfusion or if you have had a previous transplant. Sensitisation means that you will react badly to a larger number of potential donors so it will be harder to find you a match. You will be tested for the amount of sensitisation you have when you start the transplant assessment process so you can ask about your own levels to get an accurate idea about how long you might wait. There is a calculator on the NHS Blood and Transplant website to calculate this for you. Ask the transplant team in your kidney unit to help you with this.

What happens if I go on holiday?

You could receive a phone call to invite you for a kidney transplant at any time once you have been activated on the waiting list. It is therefore very important that you tell your kidney team if you are going away so that you can be suspended from the list until you get back. You will not have to start again from the bottom of the list - being suspended just means that the transplant team will not invite you for a kidney transplant while you are away at that time.

You may also be suspended from the list if you have had an illness that would make having an operation and immune suppressing treatment unsafe.



Do I have to go on dialysis before I'm eligible for a transplant?

Not at all. Ideally, if you are suitable, you should aim to join the transplant waiting list before you need dialysis. This is more likely to be possible if you have a friend or relative willing to donate a kidney to you, as the surgery can then be planned in advanced

Is a living donation better than a deceased one?

Living-donor kidneys tend to last longer than those from a deceased donor but this is not always the case and kidneys from a deceased donor still have excellent results.

How long will my transplant last?

On average, transplants from living donors last around 12- 15 years and those from deceased donors last around 8-10 years. However these are only averages – you own transplant may last longer or shorter than this.

Is there a limit on how many transplants I can have?

No, however you may have to wait longer if you have had one before as it becomes harder to find you a match as you may be more sensitised . You will need to go through the same tests again to make sure you are healthy enough to have another kidney.

Will a transplant cure my kidney disease?

A successful transplant will cure your kidney failure. However it will not cure the underlying cause of your kidney disease. Some kidney diseases can reoccur in the transplant kidney and your kidney doctor will be able to advise you what the likelihood is in your case.


There is a small chance (about 5%) that the new kidney will not work. The amount that your kidney function improves will depend on many factors such as the quality of the kidney you are given and any other conditions that you may have. Many patients will still have some form of kidney disease but a transplant aims to improve your quality of life and prevent the need for dialysis. You should talk to your kidney team about if and how a transplant will benefit you personally to help decide if you wish to pursue one.





Where can I find out more information?


- NHS Choices – Kidney Transplant:
www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-transplant
- Patient View: www.patientview.org - Online access to your health records. Ask your renal unit for details about how to join
- Renal Association Patient Information Leaflets – includes leaflets on **Kidney myth busters, Living kidney donation and a Healthy diet and Lifestyle for your kidneys –**
www.renal.org/information-resources/patient-leaflets




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