

KIDNEY TRANSPLANTATION

Your Transplant Team recognizes that the thought of kidney transplantation is alarming to most patients. We have found that the more information patients have, the better prepared they are, and the easier it is for them to cope with the reality of having transplant surgery. This packet is designed to answer many of your questions and help you to understand the transplant process.

The purpose of a kidney transplant is to implant a healthy kidney into your pelvic area that will take over the function of your damaged kidney(s). Ideally, after the transplant you will no longer require dialysis and will lead a normal life for as long as the transplant functions.

The donated organ may come from a living donor who is willing to donate a kidney to you and whose kidney is an appropriate match for you. However, the most common source of organs, is from people who are declared brain dead and whose families donate their organs for transplant. In either situation, the organ is removed from the donor and placed into the recipient by a team of highly skilled professionals.

Once you have successfully undergone the transplant, you have a good chance of leading a normal, healthy, active life. To help insure a successful outcome, it is important that you follow your physician's recommendations, which will include taking immunosuppressive medications. These are medications that prevent activity of the body's immune system or the system in the body that fights off rejection and infection. This will help to prevent the body from fighting or rejecting the new kidney.

Learning About The Kidneys

We have two kidneys, located in the middle of the back (about waist level) on either side of the spine. Each kidney is about the size of your fist and weighs approximately a quarter of a pound (about the weight of one medium apple). Blood enters the kidneys where it is then filtered and waste products are separated out. Most of what is filtered from the blood is still usable by the body and is reabsorbed into the system. The waste products mixed with excess water leave the kidneys as urine.

In addition to eliminating waste products, the kidneys regulate blood pressure, the balance of certain chemicals and fluids in the body, and the production of red blood cells.

Impaired renal function, meaning a kidney can no longer adequately perform its activities, leads to high blood pressure, fluid retention, and the body's inability to dispose of liquid waste or urine. Eventually kidney disease may progress to the point where dialysis or a transplant is necessary.