



Kidney Transplant

A kidney transplant is a surgical treatment choice for patients with advanced kidney disease. One donated kidney is placed in the patients' abdomen (lower belly) and does the work of the two failed kidneys. The patient's kidneys are not removed during the transplant operation unless there is a medical condition which requires it.

There are two sources for a kidney transplant: a **living donor kidney** given by a family member, friend, or another donor or a **deceased donor kidney** (in which the donor has died and the family has agreed to donate his/her organs). Regardless of the type of donor, the patient must go through a thorough medical evaluation to be sure you are healthy enough for this surgery. This evaluation process can take several months to complete so it needs to start early before you need dialysis. You will not be listed on the kidney transplant waiting list until the entire evaluation is completed and you have been approved for a kidney transplant. Your GFR (percentage of kidney function) must be 20% or less to be placed on the waiting list.

If you know of someone who may be interested in being a living donor, this person must also go through an extensive evaluation to be sure they are healthy enough to give you a kidney. If a person has diabetes, high blood pressure or a history of cancer, they cannot be a living donor for you. The advantage of a living donor kidney transplant is that this surgery can be planned and there is no long waiting time for a kidney. If you have a suitable living donor and we plan ahead, you may be able to receive a kidney transplant before you need to start dialysis. This is called a "**pre-emptive transplant**" and is the preferred situation if possible. If you do not have a suitable living donor available, you will be placed on the deceased donor transplant waiting list. The average waiting time for a deceased donor kidney in this area is 5 to 6 years.

At UNC, a kidney doctor or your health care provider will need to make a referral for you to be evaluated for a kidney transplant. You will then be contacted by the UNC Kidney Transplant Team to schedule your attendance at a kidney transplant orientation class held at UNC Hospitals in Chapel Hill. That is your first step of the process. After you attend this class, you will be scheduled for doctor appointments to begin your transplant evaluation to see if you are a good candidate for this treatment option.

Although we try to plan ahead, you may still need to start on dialysis before a kidney transplant can be done. Due to your medical condition or other reasons, you may not be a suitable candidate for a transplant. Or you may not be interested in the transplant

option. If this is the case, you will need to select the dialysis treatment option you would prefer – the type that is best for you, your family and your medical condition. In some cases, your kidney doctor (nephrologist) will recommend the treatment option that he or she feels would be best for you and your situation.

Advantages & Disadvantages of Kidney Transplant

Advantages	Disadvantages
No more dialysis treatments	Requires major surgery with possible risks related to surgery
More freedom	Must take anti-rejection medicines for rest of life or life of kidney
Less restrictions on diet and fluids	Higher risk for infection from these medicines
Higher chance of living a longer life	Risk of rejection with loss of kidney function/return to dialysis
More “normal” kidney function	Frequent labs to be drawn and doctor visits