

# Caring for your Organ

One of the biggest benefits of having a healthy kidney is the freedom and increased quality of life that you will have. In the early stages of recovery, it is important to remember that you still had major surgery and it is going to take your body some time to get used to your new organ. Moderation is important especially for activities that are physically taxing. In your early stages of recovery, you will meet with many staff. Their job is to teach you how to take care of your kidney. After you are released you are the main person in charge of monitoring your health and alerting others if changes in your health occur.

## Medications

As we have talked about, your body will need medications to help recover and to maintain your kidney. It is important to take all of your medications as prescribed and your pharmacist will be a great resource for questions. Due to the nature of some of your medications, it is important that you talk with your doctors and pharmacist if you take anything over the counter such as cold and flu or headache medicine since this can also interact with your other drugs.

The main medications that you will need to maintain your kidney are immunosuppressants. Common immunosuppressant drugs include Prograf, Rapamune, Cyclosporin and Prednisone. [1] If you don't take these drugs, your body will reject the organ. Since these drugs suppress (weaken) your immune system you will be at additional risk to develop infections. Like any drug, there are side effects and they range from minor headaches, hand tremors, nausea to more severe issues such as increased blood sugar and high blood pressure. Your doctors and pharmacist will work together to minimize symptoms and make sure that you don't have any serious issues.

In addition to immunosuppressants you will also be prescribed other pain and infection control medications. Since immunosuppressants weaken your immune system you are more prone to infections. It is important that you take extra precautionary steps like hand washing, getting flu vaccinations, avoiding environments where others are sick and not eating raw foods.

A natural way to help speed your recovery is exercise. Your healthcare team will help you determine what is best for you, but starting off with walking is a good first step, literally. The better you take care of your body overall the better it will take care of your new kidney. Exercise will not only help control factors such as hypertension and obesity that contribute to kidney disease, but also exercise can help reduce some of the negative side effects of immunosuppressants such as osteoporosis and weight gain.[2]

[1] Duke University. After Kidney Transplantation. Retrieved from <http://www.dukehealth.org/repository/dukehealth/2010/02/04/12/08/29/9659/Kidney-TransplantationAfter.pdf> [1].

[2] Gordon Elisa J., Phohaska Thomas, Siminoff Laura A., Needed: Tailored Exercise Regimens for Kidney Transplant Recipients. *American Journal of Kidney Disease*. 45(4): 769-774. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1242115/> [2].

## Signs of rejection

Rejection can happen to anyone and doesn't mean that there was a mistake or that you did something wrong. Rejection can be reversed if it is found early and recognizing the signs of early rejection could help keep your kidney. You should always worry about fevers because they are signs of infection, but these become even more important right after surgery.

You should also look for:

- Extreme soreness where your new kidney is
- Decreases in the amount of urine you produce
- Swollen feet or ankles
- Weakness
- Nausea

All of these things can point to your body fighting an infection and/or your kidney. Each clinic will treat rejection differently, but you might need to increase or add another immunosuppressant drug or spend some time back in the hospital.

Rejection is identified by using routine tests of kidney function much the way they were done before you had a transplant. Your medical staff will normally draw some routine blood samples and they are looking for signs of infection. Other potential tests include:[1]

- Renal flow scan that looks for blood flow through the kidney Even if your body fully rejects your kidney, there are still options available. Most patients can join the transplant list again and have the option to get another kidney.
- Ultrasound that enables your doctors to look for physical issues
- Biopsy is a surgical procedure where a small piece of tissue is collected and tested

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[1] Cleveland Clinic. Transplant Program ? What you need to know about kidney transplant rejection. Retrieved from [http://my.clevelandclinic.org/transplant/services/kidney/what\\_you\\_need\\_to\\_know.aspx](http://my.clevelandclinic.org/transplant/services/kidney/what_you_need_to_know.aspx) [3].

## Diet

After you receive a transplant, it is possible that many of the diet restrictions you had during dialysis will disappear. This however, doesn't mean that proper nutrition is any less important. Also, if you have other conditions like hypertension and diabetes, you will need to continue following those diet restrictions.

Diet and proper nutrition become even more important because some of the immunosuppressants can also increase blood sugar levels leading to an increased risk of diabetes and increase your appetite.

Also, even though many of your dialysis related restrictions go away, there are still things that you should keep doing. These are items that should continue to be limited in your diet.

- Processed foods
- Sodium
- Excess fat
- High sugar foods
- Alcohol
- Raw sushi
- Limit buffets and salad bars
- Grapefruit and star fruit or grapefruit juice (interacts with medications)
- Uncooked cookie dough
- Bean sprouts
- Undercooked meats
- Cold deli meats

These items can also either conflict with your medications or put you at a higher risk for an infection.

Maintaining an ideal bodyweight and eating properly will lower your risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and help reduce complications from surgery. Being underweight or undernourished can be just as bad as being overweight. Your body needs fuel to work and it needs vitamins and nutrients to heal and be healthy. Your nutrition will be an excellent resource to help you with your diet.

To learn more about nutrition, stop by our DPC nutrition management [page](#). [4]

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#### **Links**

[1] <http://www.dukehealth.org/repository/dukehealth/2010/02/04/12/08/29/9659/Kidney-TransplantationAfter.pdf>

[2] <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1242115/>

[3] [http://my.clevelandclinic.org/transplant/services/kidney/what\\_you\\_need\\_to\\_know.aspx](http://my.clevelandclinic.org/transplant/services/kidney/what_you_need_to_know.aspx)

[4] <http://dpcedcenter.org/classroom/nutrition-management-kidney-disease-patients/following-diet-transplant-patient>