Get the Facts: Kidney Transplantation

A kidney transplant is an operation during which someone gets a new kidney. The new kidney comes from another person. The person giving the kidney is called a donor.

What do I need to know about getting a kidney transplant?

• The transplanted kidney cleans your blood the same way that your kidneys did when they were healthy.
• Only one kidney is transplanted. A person can live a healthy life with only one working kidney.
• Your doctor will send you to a transplant center. You will be checked by a transplant team.
  — You must be healthy enough to have the surgery. You must also be able to take medicine to help your body accept the new kidney.
  — The donor kidney must match your blood and tissue types.
  — You will be put on a waiting list to get a kidney from a non-living donor. This is because more people need kidneys than there are kidneys available. You can be on more than one waiting list, even one in a different state, if you are able to travel.

How will my life change after I get a transplant?

• Once you receive a transplant, you will need to see your care team on a regular basis.
• You will have to take kidney medicine for as long as your new kidney lasts.
• Your diet may change after you receive a transplant. Talk to your dietitian for more information.

How will I pay for my kidney transplant?

The social worker at your dialysis center will work with you to figure out how your costs will be paid.

• Medicare typically covers 80 percent of the costs. This is only if the transplant is done in a hospital approved by Medicare to do kidney transplants. If you have private insurance, you should check with your insurance company to see what costs are covered.
• You will need to take medicine to lower the chance of your body rejecting the transplant. The costs of these drugs may not be covered.

What are some outcomes of a kidney transplant?

• Your overall health and quality of life may improve.
• Complications can happen with any surgery. Speak to your transplant care team about what could happen with a kidney transplant.
• Your body may reject the kidney. Talk with your transplant care team about this.