

Understanding the kidney transplant pool

This leaflet aims to answer some of your questions about matching, allocating and receiving a donated kidney. If you still have questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

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How does the transplant pool work?

The transplant pool is a list of patients who would benefit from receiving a kidney transplant. The list does not have a top or a bottom, and the time that people wait for a transplant varies greatly. When a kidney is offered for donation from someone who has died, we consider the following:

- In which patient will this kidney have the best chance of succeeding?
- Which patient most needs this kidney?

Kidneys are most likely to succeed where the blood group of the donor and recipient are compatible (this is often called ABO (blood group) compatible) and where the tissue type of the donor and recipient are compatible (this is often called HLA (human leukocyte antigen) tissue type compatible).

HLA proteins alert the immune system that a donor kidney is 'foreign' and cause the body to reject the kidney. If the donor and recipient HLAs are very similar (the match is good) then this is less likely to happen and the kidney is more likely to be accepted. Therefore kidneys are offered on the following basis:

- If a deceased donor kidney becomes available, and a perfect match can be found where the blood group and tissue type are completely compatible, the kidney will be allocated to this patient.
- If no one with a perfect match is waiting then the patient with the next best match will receive the kidney. If several patients have an equal degree of matching then a scoring system will determine who is offered the kidney.

The scoring system is based on:

- age (younger patients are prioritised).
- age difference between the recipient and the donor (a small age difference is favoured).
- time on the waiting list (those who have waited the longest are prioritised).
- some patients are very likely to reject most kidneys. If a kidney is found that they could receive, then they are prioritised to receive that kidney.
- if a patient is unlikely to be offered another kidney quite quickly for medical reasons, they will be prioritised.

Why have I been selected to go into the transplant pool?

You have been selected to go into the transplant pool because the kidney team believe that you are likely to benefit from a kidney transplant and are well enough to have the operation. You will be reviewed regularly while you are on the waiting list to make sure that you are still fit enough for a transplant.

What are my chances of receiving a kidney transplant?

Some blood groups and certain tissue types are hard to match to donor kidneys. If you would like to know more about this, please ask the kidney team.

Once you have decided a kidney is suitable for me, what happens next?

We will contact you by phone. It is therefore very important that you always check that we have the correct contact details for you.

When we contact you, we will:

- ask if you are well
- ask when you last dialysed (to plan whether you need dialysis before surgery)
- advise you not to eat or drink
- ask you to come to Guy's Hospital as soon as possible.

Kidney transplants are more likely to be successful if the time between the kidney being donated and the kidney being transplanted is minimised. We ask you to come to hospital as soon as possible so that we can ensure you are well enough for the operation.

By the time you come into hospital, we will also know whether the donor kidney is definitely suitable for transplantation. Only after these final checks have been done can we confirm that your kidney transplant will definitely go ahead.

Will I ever be suspended from the transplant pool?

This may happen temporarily in the following situations:

- If you develop a complex medical problem which would make the operation unsafe.
- If your weight has increased, as this increases the risk of complications.
- If you have been on holiday in a country where you may have been at risk from blood-borne infections, as this would make it unsafe to give you the immunosuppressive drugs before and after the transplant.

If any of these situations occur we will always discuss it with you and regularly review your situation so that you can be re-activated into the transplant pool as soon as it is safe to do so.

You can also suspend yourself from the transplant pool by informing your transplant co-ordinator at any time (for instance you might want to enjoy a special holiday and not be bothered by the possibility of a kidney becoming available).

Sometimes a patient's health will change and we have to advise removing them from the transplant waiting pool permanently. If this does happen, we will always discuss it with your first.

If a date has been set for you to receive a living donor transplant, you will be suspended from the deceased-donor pool.

Is there an upper age limit for receiving a kidney transplant?

There is no age limit for having a kidney transplant provided you remain well, but we do need to ensure that the benefits of transplantation outweigh the risks. This is why we may need to repeat some tests regularly (for example your heart tests, to make sure you will still be able to cope with the anaesthetic).

What can I do while waiting for a transplant?

- Look after your health by dialysing regularly and taking all your medications. It helps if you keep to a healthy diet, and take regular exercise
- Stay out of the sun and use a high protection sun block (factor 50). The combination of sun-related skin damage and immunosuppressant drugs given after a transplant can make you more prone to some types of skin tumours. By reducing your exposure to the sun, even before you have a transplant, you can reduce this risk.
- Keep your contact details up to date and give us additional phone numbers where we may be able to get in touch with you (parents, friends etc).
- Make sure your blood tests are done monthly (by having a recent blood sample, we can look for as good a match as possible for you in a donor kidney).
- Think about whether any of your family or friends might be prepared to consider donating a kidney and let us know. We can talk to them and provide information without any commitment.

Contact us

For further information, please contact the transplant pool recipient co-ordinator, **t:** 020 7188 9391, or call the hospital switchboard, **t:** 020 7188 7188 and ask for the bleep desk. Ask for **bleep 1521** and wait for a response. This will connect you to the transplant pool recipient co-ordinator directly.

For more leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints)

e: complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

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