

Kidney Transplant Preparation Checklist

A step-by-step guide for patients, caregivers, and families



A kidney transplant is a journey with many steps: referral, evaluation, waiting, surgery, and lifelong follow-up care. Being organized helps you move through each stage with less stress and helps your transplant team help you. This free checklist from The Liver and Kidney Hope Foundation walks you through what to prepare at every stage.

How to use this checklist

Work through one section at a time. Check off items as you finish them, and write notes in the margins. Every transplant center has its own requirements, so some items may not apply to you, and your center may add others. Bring this checklist to appointments and share it with your caregiver.

Important

This checklist is for general education only and is not medical advice. The Liver and Kidney Hope Foundation is not a medical provider. Your transplant center's instructions always come first. If you have a medical emergency, call 911.

1. Getting Started: Referral & First Steps

Most people begin the transplant process through a referral from their nephrologist or dialysis unit.

- ☐ Ask my nephrologist or dialysis team whether I may be a transplant candidate and request a referral
- ☐ Research transplant centers (location, wait times, insurance accepted, living donor program) and choose one or more
- ☐ Ask whether I can be listed at more than one center (multiple listing) and what that would require
- ☐ Call my insurance company to confirm transplant coverage, in-network centers, and prior-authorization rules
- ☐ Gather my medical records: kidney history, lab results, imaging, dialysis records, and a list of all doctors
- ☐ Write down all medications, vitamins, and supplements with doses
- ☐ Ask about the timing of listing: in the U.S., waiting time can begin once kidney function drops to a set level or dialysis starts, so ask my team early

2. The Transplant Evaluation

The evaluation checks whether a transplant is safe for you and helps the team plan your care. It usually takes several visits.

Medical tests (as ordered by my team)

- ☐ Blood tests, including blood type and tissue typing (HLA) and antibody screening
- ☐ Heart testing (such as ECG, echocardiogram, or stress test) if requested
- ☐ Imaging studies (chest X-ray, ultrasound, or CT scan) if requested
- ☐ Age-appropriate cancer screenings are up to date (for example, colonoscopy, mammogram, Pap test)
- ☐ Dental exam and clearance, with any needed dental work completed
- ☐ Vaccinations reviewed and updated before transplant, as my team advises

Meetings with the transplant team

- ☐ Meet with the transplant nephrologist and surgeon
- ☐ Meet with the transplant social worker (support system, housing, transportation, coping)
- ☐ Meet with the financial counselor (insurance, medication costs, out-of-pocket expenses)
- ☐ Meet with the transplant dietitian if referred
- ☐ Meet with the transplant pharmacist to learn about anti-rejection medicines
- ☐ Complete any mental health or substance-use assessment the center requires

3. Exploring Living Donation

A kidney from a living donor may shorten the wait and often lasts longer. Many people feel unsure how to ask, and that is normal.

- ☐ Ask my center about its living donor program and paired kidney exchange options
- ☐ Learn how to share my story with family, friends, and community (letters, social media, a donor champion)
- ☐ Identify a donor champion who can speak on my behalf
- ☐ Give interested donors the center's living donor contact information (donors are evaluated separately to protect them)
- ☐ Understand that potential donors have their own independent advocate and can change their mind at any time

4. While I'm on the Waiting List

Being listed means you must be ready at any time. Staying healthy and reachable keeps you active on the list.

Stay reachable

- ☐ Give the center every phone number where I can be reached, and keep my phone charged and on at all times
- ☐ Tell the center right away if my phone number, address, or insurance changes
- ☐ Tell the center before traveling, and ask how far I may travel

Stay as healthy as possible

- ☐ Keep all dialysis sessions and medical appointments
- ☐ Take medications exactly as prescribed
- ☐ Follow the diet and fluid guidance from my kidney care team
- ☐ Stay active in ways my doctor approves
- ☐ Avoid smoking and vaping, and follow my center's rules on alcohol
- ☐ Report any infection, hospital stay, blood transfusion, or new diagnosis to the transplant team
- ☐ Complete repeat tests the center requests to keep my evaluation current

5. Planning My Support & Logistics

Transplant centers need to know you have a plan for support during recovery.

- ☐ Choose a primary caregiver and a backup caregiver, and review their responsibilities with them
- ☐ Plan transportation to the hospital at any hour, plus rides to frequent follow-up visits after surgery
- ☐ Arrange lodging near the center if I live far away (ask the social worker about nearby housing)
- ☐ Plan time off work and ask HR about FMLA or disability options; plan for my caregiver's time off too
- ☐ Arrange care for children, pets, and household tasks for several weeks
- ☐ Make a budget for travel, lodging, parking, meals, and medication co-pays
- ☐ Explore fundraising or assistance programs if needed (ask the social worker for options)
- ☐ Complete or update an advance directive and choose a healthcare power of attorney

Caregiver tip

Caregivers need support too. Encourage your caregiver to write down their questions, attend key appointments with you, and plan breaks for themselves.

6. Ready for The Call: Hospital Bag

When a kidney becomes available, you may have only a few hours to get to the hospital. Pack ahead.

- ☐ Photo ID, insurance cards, and transplant center contact card
- ☐ Current medication list (and medicines in original bottles if the center asks)
- ☐ This checklist and my contact list
- ☐ Phone, charger, and a long charging cable
- ☐ Comfortable, loose clothing and non-slip shoes or slippers
- ☐ Toiletries, glasses or contacts, hearing aids, and CPAP machine if I use one
- ☐ A notebook and pen for questions and instructions
- ☐ A written plan telling family who to notify and who will care for children or pets
- ☐ Know my center's rules for eating, drinking, and dialysis once I get the call

7. Preparing for Life After Transplant

Recovery and follow-up care are just as important as the surgery itself.

- ☐ Learn the names, purpose, and schedule of my anti-rejection (immunosuppressant) medicines
- ☐ Choose a pharmacy that can reliably stock transplant medicines, and confirm my coverage
- ☐ Set up a pill organizer and phone reminders so I never miss a dose
- ☐ Plan for frequent lab work and clinic visits in the first months
- ☐ Learn the signs of rejection and infection, and know when to call the team
- ☐ Learn food safety and infection-prevention habits recommended by my team
- ☐ Plan sun protection and regular skin checks, as advised
- ☐ Ask when I can drive, lift, return to work, and resume exercise
- ☐ Connect with a transplant support group (TLHF's support groups are a great place to start)

8. My Transplant Contacts

Role	Name	Phone	Notes
Transplant coordinator			
Transplant center after-hours line			
Transplant nephrologist			
Nephrologist (my kidney doctor)			
Dialysis unit			
Social worker			
Financial counselor			
Primary caregiver			
Backup caregiver			
Pharmacy			
Insurance company			

9. Questions to Ask My Transplant Team

Some starting points. Add your own and bring this page to appointments.

- ☐ How long is the typical wait at this center for someone with my blood type?
- ☐ What could make me temporarily inactive on the list?
- ☐ How will I be contacted when a kidney is available, and how quickly must I respond?
- ☐ Can a living donor be evaluated here, and do you offer paired exchange?
- ☐ How long will I be in the hospital, and how often will I need visits afterward?
- ☐ What will my medications cost, and what help is available?

My Questions	Answer / Notes

10. Trusted Resources

Your transplant center — your first and best source of information about your care

Transplant Living (transplantliving.org) — patient education from UNOS

National Kidney Foundation (kidney.org) — kidney disease and transplant education

American Kidney Fund (kidneyfund.org) — education and financial assistance programs

Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (optn.transplant.hrsa.gov) — U.S. transplant system policies and data

The Liver and Kidney Hope Foundation — education, community support, and support groups for patients and families

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