
Kidney transplant journey guide



We understand that the transplant journey is long and can be complex. The Prisma Health Transplant Center team of dedicated experts is here to assist you every step of the way.



Your kidney transplant care plan

First step: The referral

Typically, the first step in the process of a kidney transplant is sending a referral from your nephrologist or dialysis center to our program asking for you to be evaluated for a kidney transplant.



The following medical records are required for your referral:

1. Nephrologist's history and physical
2. Current office/progress notes from your nephrologist
3. Dialysis social worker initial evaluation
4. Copy of ESRD form 2728 (dialysis center will provide)
5. Recent labs from dialysis center or nephrology office
6. Completed insurance information sheet (on your referral form)
7. Colonoscopy records (patients over 45 years old)
8. Pap smear records (female patients)
9. Pathology reports and treatment records for any patient with a cancer history
10. Copies of driver's license, insurance cards and drug coverage cards (front and back)

Your referral contains the vital information necessary for us to create a picture of you and your health.



Referral information can be mailed or faxed to:

Prisma Health Transplant Center
890 W. Faris Rd., Ste. 510
Greenville, SC 29605
F 864-455-1775



Second step: Evaluation

Kidney transplant patient education class

One of the best predictors of a good outcome after a kidney transplant is how well patients and caregivers are educated before the transplant occurs. As part of the evaluation process, you will have transplant training for about an hour. During this review, we will discuss each part of the transplant process, the waiting list, transplant medications, the surgery and resources available to you after transplant. This is a great opportunity to learn and ask questions about what to expect on your journey.

Patient evaluation

Our kidney transplant evaluation process is designed to be comprehensive – to ensure your best possible outcome – and personalized – to focus on your and your family's specific needs and comfort. You will undergo a series of laboratory and medical tests while getting to know our transplant care team. The evaluation is a multidisciplinary process that focuses on your physical and emotional health while giving you a chance to address questions and concerns you or your caregiver may have about what to expect during the transplant process.

Your transplant team

The journey to receive a kidney transplant can be long and requires support. You can rely on your transplant team to help you each step of the way. The first step of the process is meeting your care team individually on your evaluation day. These team members will stay closely connected during your entire evaluation process and beyond.

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- **The transplant surgeon** is here to chart the best possible path for a successful kidney transplant and your long-term health. He will have an open and honest conversation about the transplant surgery and what you can expect before, during and after the kidney transplant. You and your support person are encouraged to ask any question you might have. It is natural to have concerns about a surgery, and this is your chance to have them addressed.
- **The transplant nephrologist** will review your medical history and testing in detail, as well as perform a history and physical on the day of evaluation. To help you understand what to expect, he will review the transplant process, any health issues you might have, the medical aspects of transplantation and any further testing that may need to be done. He will be there to take care of you in the hospital immediately after transplant and after you go home.
- **The social worker** is here from the beginning of your transplant journey to make sure you have support necessary to successfully undergo a kidney transplant. Your social worker will make sure you have the resources to thrive. She will assist with identifying what help is needed, from housing to financial assistance to a transportation plan, and help you find the resources available to create a successful transplant plan.

- **The transplant dietitian** is dedicated to developing a strong nutrition plan to keep you as healthy as possible going into surgery and after your successful transplant. Nutrition is a key component to being strong enough to undergo surgery and recover quickly. Your dietitian will help you understand how dialysis, the transplant surgery and medications may impact your appetite. Also, the dietitian will help you develop a detailed eating guide before and after surgery.
- **The transplant nurse coordinator** is your personalized liaison within the transplant program and will help coordinate your entire journey to a kidney transplant. She will lead your education about transplant, act as a continued resource during the process, and help schedule your testing and physician visits. She will be your biggest advocate and guide, as well as transplant resource and expert. You will stay in close contact with your coordinator during your entire transplant journey.
- **The financial coordinator** is here to explain the financial implications of a kidney transplant. She will create a financial strategy with you, helping you understand the cost of the transplant and medications, coverage you have, and resources potentially available to you. Throughout the transplant process, our financial coordinator and social worker will stay in close contact with you and your insurance company to help make this complex process as simple and straightforward as possible. Resources are available, and we are here to help.

Testing

By the time you visit us, we will have a good picture of your overall health. However, we will still perform labs and other tests as part of the evaluation process to make sure your body is healthy enough to undergo a kidney transplant surgery. We will have a schedule for the following tests and guide you and your caregiver through your evaluation day:

- Blood tests
- CXR (chest X-ray)
- EKG
- Abdominal CT

Your transplant nephrologist and/or transplant coordinator will discuss your test results and any additional tests that may be needed during your evaluation or thereafter.

Review committee

Once your evaluation is complete and the transplant team has reviewed the results, your transplant nurse coordinator will present your case in our review committee. In this multidisciplinary review, each member of the team will review and discuss your individual case to determine the best care options for you. If your transplant team feels that a kidney transplant is your best option, you will be placed on the waiting list for a kidney.





Third step: Wait list or living donation

What is the kidney transplant waiting list and how does it work?

Everyone waiting for a deceased donor kidney transplant in the United States is placed on the same list managed by the United Network of Organ Sharing (UNOS). You will be notified by your transplant nurse coordinator once you have been listed and begin to accrue time. Your wait time for a kidney transplant is mostly determined by the amount of time you have been either listed or on dialysis (whichever was first), but several other factors are also taken into consideration such as:

- If you are a pediatric patient
- How compatible your immune system is to a potential donor
- Proximity of the donor hospital to your transplant program
- The amount of your immune system's reactivity

Wait times around the country can vary, but it can take years to receive an offer. So it is important that you communicate any changes in your health to your transplant nurse coordinator. Though it can be hard to wait for an offer, we will be here supporting you every step of the way.

What to expect when you receive an offer

While on the list, you need to be ready to receive a call at any time. That means staying prepared by following your health regimen; controlling your weight; taking your medications as directed; going to your medical, vision and dental appointments; and communicating any changes in your address, insurance, support person, ride arrangements or health status to your coordinator.

Receiving the offer for a kidney transplant is a moment many of our patients will never forget. When it happens to you, take a deep breath and relax. Your coordinator will walk you through the process. The coordinator will discuss the offer with you and ask several questions such as:

1. Have you had any recent health issues, new medical problems or admissions to the hospital, such as a heart attack, infection (including COVID-19) or cancer diagnosis?
2. Have you had a recent cold or flu?
3. Do you have any open or chronic wounds?
4. Do you still have a support person and ride arrangement?
5. Any questions?



While on the list, you need to be ready to receive a call at any time.

It is important to be open and honest in answering questions asked by your coordinators to avoid unnecessary risks for surgery. The next step is to not eat, drink or take any medications and make your way to Prisma Health Greenville Memorial Hospital to be admitted and receive your kidney transplant.

Living donor process

The process of a living donor kidney transplant differs from a deceased donor kidney transplant in several ways. Living donor transplants don't require as long a wait, last longer and lead to quicker recovery overall. So for most recipients, it is the best option. Also, the living donor transplant procedure can be planned, making the process less stressful.



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Our transplant team will be ready to take you step by step through the entire process of admission, lab work and other testing to make sure you are ready to go when it is time for your transplant.

Fourth step: Surgery

What to expect before surgery

Once your nurse coordinator has discussed your kidney transplant offer and health status with you, you will immediately go to Prisma Health Greenville Memorial Hospital to be admitted. You will be admitted in our Transplant Unit, where your transplant nursing team will be expecting you.

Our transplant team will be ready to take you step by step through the entire process of admission, lab work and other testing to make sure you are ready to go when it is time for your transplant. It is common to have you undergo dialysis before surgery based on your last dialysis date, fluid status and lab test results.

Your transplant surgery and nephrology teams will also see you, perform a history and physical, answer any questions or concerns, and have you sign a consent for surgery. After that, you will receive the first dose of your anti-rejection medications as your nurse escorts you to the operating room.

It is important to understand that even though we may call you into the hospital, not every offer will result in a kidney transplant for you. This can happen if we find something out about the kidney or your health that makes the transplant not the best offer for you or too high a risk. Though it is not very common and always a disappointment, we will make the decision not to move forward only if we believe it is not in your best interest. Remember, even if one offer doesn't move forward for you, there is, quite possibly, another right around the corner. We will be waiting and ready with you when that moment comes.

Surgery: The transplant

We understand that going to the operating room can be intimidating. Rest assured, your OR transplant team of surgeons, anesthesiologists, nurse anesthetists, nurses and scrub techs are trained and experienced professionals with your best interest at heart. We are here and ready 24 hours a day to give you the lifesaving gift of a transplant. We take that responsibility seriously.

During your procedure, you will undergo general anesthesia; have constant heart rate, blood pressure, and blood oxygen monitoring; and have a dedicated staff communicating clearly and continually to ensure the safest, most beneficial environment for your transplant procedure.

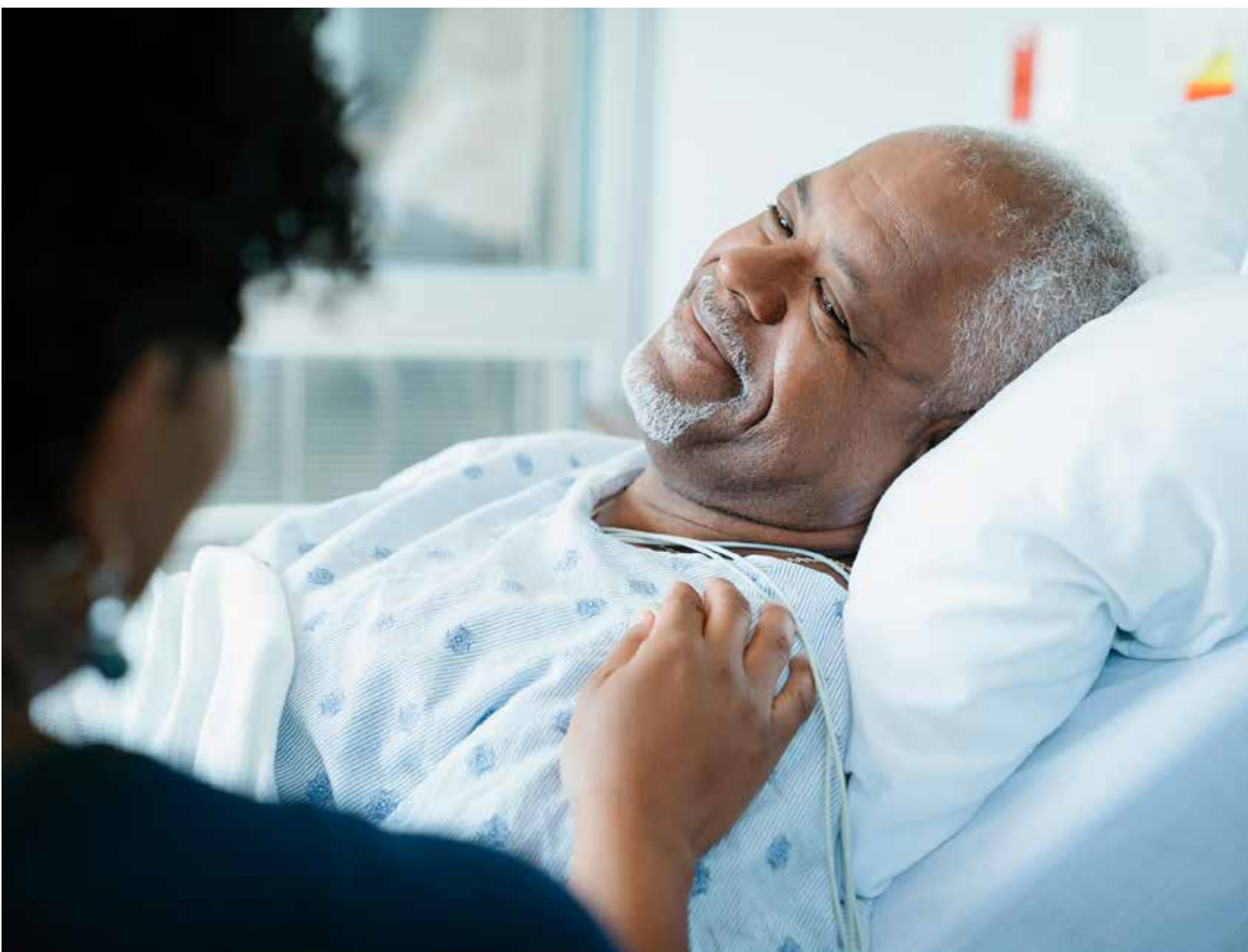
Most kidney transplants last between two to four hours. After the procedure, you will travel to the post anesthesia care unit (PACU) to recover for about one hour until you are awake and alert enough to be transferred back to your transplant unit.

Recovering after surgery

The first step into your new, healthier life with a kidney transplant has been made! What can you expect after surgery? Time in the hospital and recovery after surgery can differ for each patient. However, most patients can expect between 4–6 days in the hospital after a kidney transplant.

As you recover, an entire multidisciplinary team will see you every day in the hospital to help shepherd you through your stay. We will monitor you for labs, kidney function, pain, bowel function, appetite and many other factors to make sure you are on a course for discharge to home when appropriate.

The most important thing you can do in this time is let us know how you are feeling, work with the transplant team to understand your medication and treatment regimen, and try to increase your food and liquid intake, activity and breathing exercises every day while in the hospital and after discharge until you are fully recovered.





Fifth step: Living healthfully

Life after your kidney transplant:

It can seem like you've reached the end of a very long journey when you are able to go home after your transplant. However, it is just the next step in the process of reaching your goal of a healthy life with a kidney transplant. We will be there with you just as we were while you were waiting for a transplant, to guide you through this next phase of your care.

Before your discharge from the hospital, our transplant team will work with you to make sure you understand your medications and treatment plan after surgery as well as your Transplant Clinic appointment date and time. We will give you all the resources necessary to thrive, including the phone numbers to contact for any questions you need answered any time of day or night. Your nurse coordinator will stay in regular contact with you, and you will follow up in our clinic frequently for the first several months after your transplant.

Transplant appointments will include lab work and visits with your transplant team to make sure your kidney is functioning well and your recovery is excellent. In the first month after transplant, we will typically see patients in our clinic twice a week, gradually decreasing your frequency of visits to once a week and then once every two weeks until you are referred to your nephrologist for routine care 3–6 months after your transplant (though we may follow you longer if your recovery is delayed or if it is the preference of your nephrologist). Ultimately, we will see you on a once or twice yearly basis after your kidney transplant.

It is important to follow your treatment plan and medication regimen to care for your kidney after transplant. The anti-rejection medications are very important to take as prescribed. Even missing your medication dose for a day or two can lead to a kidney transplant rejection, which can lead to premature loss of your new kidney.

Before discharge and clinic, we will give detailed instructions on your medication regimen. We are also available 24 hours a day if you have any questions about your medications or if you have trouble obtaining your medications for any reason.



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PrismaHealth.org/KidneyTransplant

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