

# The Kidney Transplant Process



A step-by-step guide for  
kidney transplant recipients

**Kidney transplantation is one treatment option for kidney disease. A kidney transplant can offer freedom from dialysis, improved physical and mental health, a better quality of life, and an increased lifespan.**

With all those benefits, you might be saying “sign me up!” But transplantation is not the right choice for everyone. If you have a serious medical or psychological condition, other treatment options may be more suitable.

Kidneys for transplant come from two types of donors – living donors and deceased donors. This brochure will take you step-by-step through the journey so you will know what to expect before, during and after a kidney transplant.

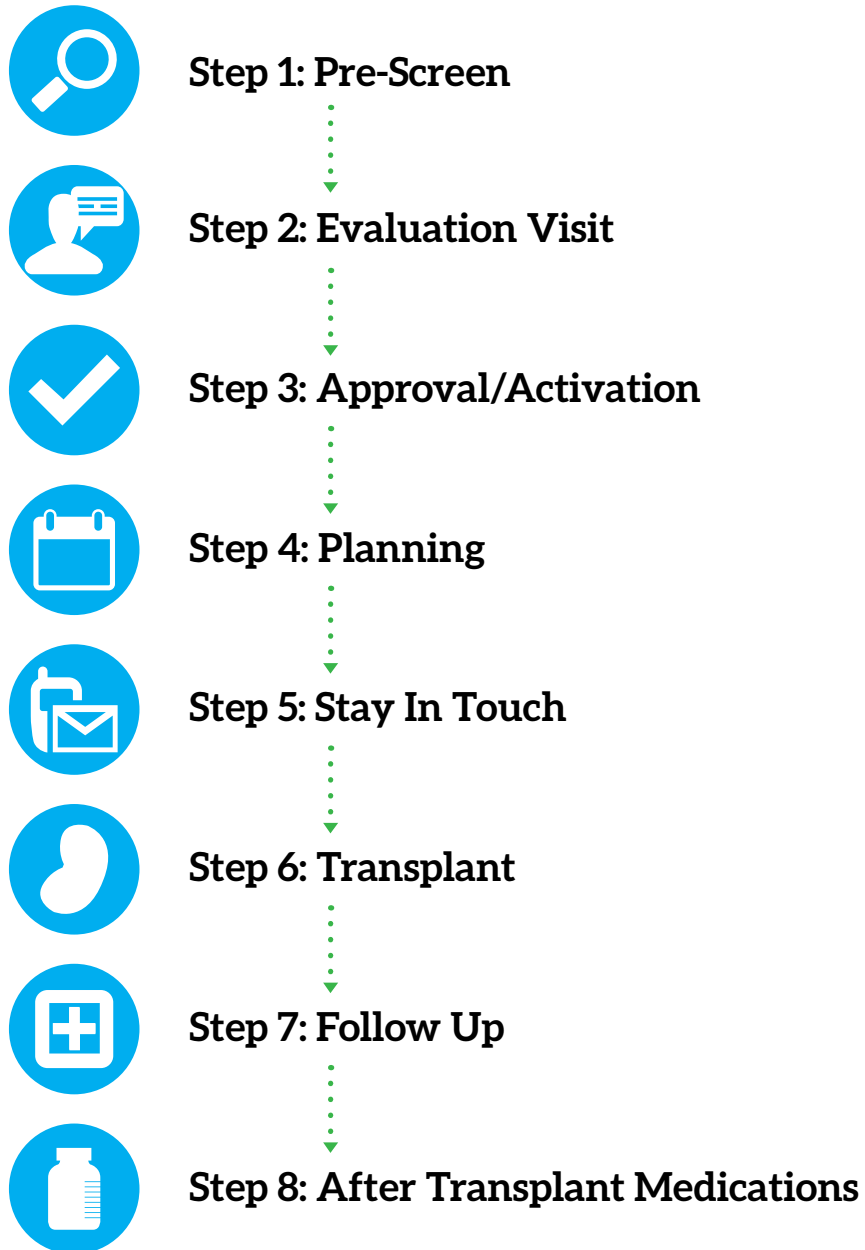


*Fatima (left) recipient, Salimah (right) living donor*

## **Will a kidney transplant cure my kidney disease?**

A kidney transplant is a treatment and not a cure for kidney disease. Following a transplant, medications to suppress your immune system must be taken for as long as you have your transplanted kidney. Transplanted kidneys can function well for many years, and sometimes even decades.

## Referral to Transplant



## Getting Started

### **STEP 1: PRE-SCREEN**

Your referring nephrologist will ask you to do some testing as part of the referral process. This will be done close to home.

### **STEP 2: EVALUATION VISIT**

Once the results from the pre-screen are received, you will be booked for a transplant team evaluation.

The transplant team evaluation takes place in Vancouver, and you will be assessed by a nurse coordinator, social worker, transplant nephrologist and a transplant surgeon. You may want to bring a family member or support person with you to the visit. You can expect the evaluation visit to take several hours.

After your assessment the entire team will meet to review your case. Sometimes the team needs more information or testing to make a decision. For example, the team may wish to refer you to a cardiologist, gastroenterologist, or other specialist so the transplant team can have all the information it needs about your health. You will be informed of the outcome as soon as possible.

### **STEP 3: APPROVAL/ACTIVATION**

Your assessment must be completed and your transplant team must believe you are a good candidate for transplant. A living donor transplant may be an option for you, as it will allow you to receive a transplant sooner, ideally even before you have to start dialysis.

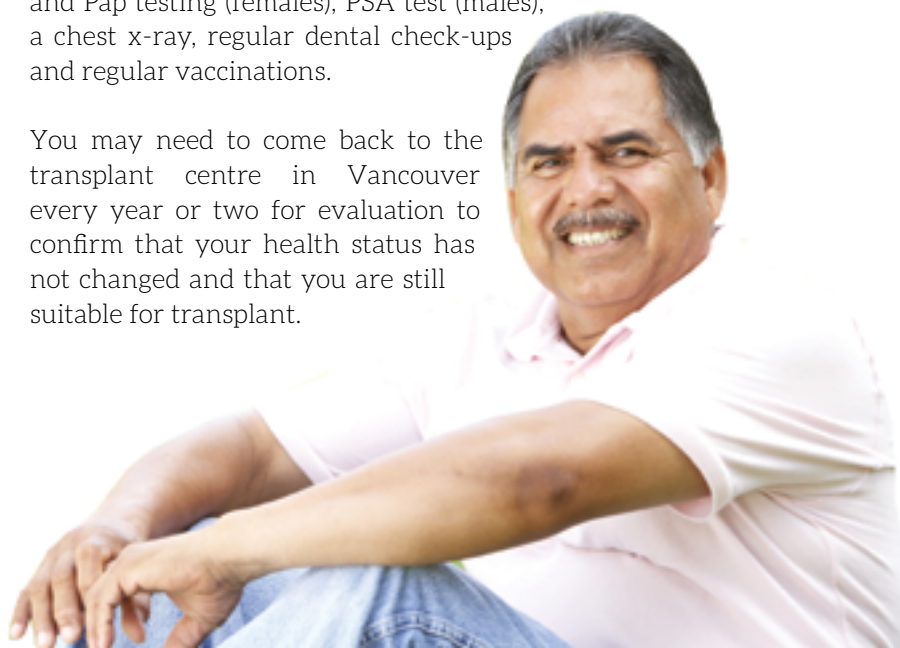


If you have an approved living donor we can plan a transplant date that is convenient for the donor and you. You can find more information on how to approach potential donors in the brochure "Finding a Donor." If someone you know is interested in becoming a living donor they may wish to read the brochure "The Living Donor Kidney Transplant Process." They can also call your transplant centre directly for more information. Contact information for the transplant centres is listed on the back of this brochure.

If a living donor transplant is not an option, once you have started dialysis, you will be placed on the waiting list for a deceased donor kidney transplant. How long you will wait is impossible to predict and depends on such things as finding a donor organ that matches your blood type and determining whether you have antibodies in your blood that prevent you from receiving certain donor organs. You could wait months or years for a suitable kidney from a deceased donor.

You will have to do yearly testing, including mammogram and Pap testing (females), PSA test (males), a chest x-ray, regular dental check-ups and regular vaccinations.

You may need to come back to the transplant centre in Vancouver every year or two for evaluation to confirm that your health status has not changed and that you are still suitable for transplant.



#### **STEP 4: PLANNING**

While you are waiting you will need to make a plan so that you are prepared when the time comes for your transplant. Your plan should include arrangements for: travel to the transplant centre, time off work, childcare and pet care, and ensuring bill payments, banking and financial needs are seen to during your recovery.

If you live outside of Vancouver, you must be prepared to relocate to Vancouver for approximately two to three months after the transplant. If you are not able to stay with family or friends, you may need to rent an apartment or furnished accommodation near the transplant centre. The transplant social worker can help you make plans for travel and accommodation. Ask about the Kidney Foundation's Kidney Suites—furnished accommodation that may be available for little or no cost for up to eight weeks. It is important to have a plan for family or other social support to help you when you leave the hospital.



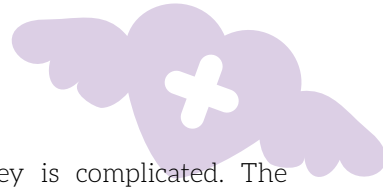
#### **STEP 5: STAY IN TOUCH**

As you wait for a transplant, it is important to stay in touch with the transplant team. Let them know of any changes in your health. If you move or change contact information make sure they know how to reach you.





## STEP 6: TRANSPLANT



Finding a matching donor kidney is complicated. The factors used to match donor kidneys with recipients include the donor and recipient's blood group, age and tissue type, and the time the recipient has spent on the waiting list. All donor organs are screened to ensure it is safe to proceed with the transplant.

Once a matching donor kidney is found and it becomes your turn for transplant, the transplant surgery will take place in Vancouver. You will need to make arrangements to come into your transplant hospital as soon as the team has called you. The surgery usually takes 3-5 hours and you will typically remain in the hospital for 5-7 days.

### Living with a kidney transplant

Kidney transplantation requires a serious commitment to taking your medications and to following your transplant team's care plan.



## STEP 7: FOLLOW-UP

When you leave the hospital you will need the help of family or your social support group as you continue to recover.

For the next two to three months you will be followed very closely by the Vancouver Post Transplant Clinic. You will be seen by the Post Transplant Team at least twice a week and you may need blood testing in between.

If you don't live in the Lower Mainland area, you will need to relocate to Vancouver temporarily so we may follow you very closely. Once you are medically stable, arrangements can be made for your continued follow-up care at a Post Transplant Clinic closer to your home.

Once you are at home, you will need monthly blood testing at your local lab and close monitoring with the team at your Post Transplant Clinic.



## STEP 8: AFTER TRANSPLANT - MEDICATIONS

After transplant you will need daily immunosuppressant (anti-rejection) medication to keep your body from rejecting your new kidney. You will need to take these medications as long as you have your transplant. These medications can have side effects and your transplant team will monitor you closely to minimize any impact.

Several anti-rejection medications are used in post transplant care. All of them work to prevent the immune system from rejecting a transplanted kidney. This also means they make it harder for your immune system to fight bacteria, viruses, and cancer cells. This puts you at a higher risk for infections, especially viral illnesses and cancer.

In addition to anti-rejection drugs, you may also need other medications to treat high blood pressure, diabetes or any other health conditions you may have. It is not uncommon for patients to need up to 10 different medicines after a transplant. BC Transplant covers the cost of your anti-rejection medication only. The cost of other medications is your responsibility.



You must take anti-rejection medications for as long as you have your transplanted organ.

You will also need regular visits with your family doctor to monitor your overall health. This includes periodic screening for skin cancer, which is the most common post transplant cancer.

### Why do I need immunosuppressant medications?

Your body's immune system is designed to fight anything foreign to it. This is good if it is an infection but not good if it is your new kidney. To prevent your body from fighting and rejecting your new kidney you must take anti-rejection medications. In organ transplants, there is no such thing as a perfect match (except for organs donated by an identical twin). You must take this medication for as long as you have your transplanted kidney. If you ever stop taking your anti-rejection medication your body will reject your new kidney.

For videos on living donation and kidney transplant go to [www.transplant.bc.ca](http://www.transplant.bc.ca).

## Need more information?

### St. Paul's Hospital Pre-Transplant Program

Unit 6A, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Providence Building  
1081 Burrard St.  
Vancouver, BC V6Z 1Y6  
Phone: 604-806-9078  
Fax: 604-806-9858  
Toll Free: 1-877-955-1755  
donornurse@providencehealth.bc.ca  
recipientnurse@providencehealth.bc.ca  
[www.providencehealthcare.org](http://www.providencehealthcare.org)

### Vancouver General Hospital Pre-Transplant Service

5<sup>th</sup> Floor, Gordon and Leslie Diamond Health Care Centre  
2775 Laurel St.  
Vancouver, BC V5Z 1M9  
Phone: 604-875-5182  
Fax: 604-875-5236  
Toll Free: 1-855-875-5182  
[www.vch.ca](http://www.vch.ca)

### BC Children's Hospital Renal Transplant Program

K4-172  
4480 Oak St.  
Vancouver, BC V6H 3V4  
Phone: 604-875-3613  
Fax: 604-875-2943

## Other Resources

### BC Transplant

Phone: 604-877-2240  
Toll Free: 1-800-663-6189  
[www.transplant.bc.ca](http://www.transplant.bc.ca)

### Kidney Foundation of Canada, BC Branch

Phone: 604-736-9775  
Toll Free: 1-800-567-8112  
[www.kidney.bc.ca](http://www.kidney.bc.ca)

Other brochures you may find useful:

**The Living Donor Kidney Transplant Process:**  
A step-by-step guide for living kidney donors


**Finding a Donor**  
Getting the Word Out: A step-by-step guide for  
reaching out to potential donors



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 [@bc\\_transplant](https://twitter.com/bc_transplant)

BC Transplant BC Renal Agency

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