



Information for Patients After Kidney Donation

You have given a very generous gift, the gift of a new life to your loved one. It is a gift that is not easy to give. This pamphlet will answer some common questions about how to care for yourself following the surgery.

How much physical exercise should I do?

If your kidney was removed laparoscopically, you shouldn't lift anything heavier than 15 pounds for three weeks following surgery. If your kidney was removed through an open flank incision, you shouldn't lift anything heavier than 15 pounds for 5 weeks. You should get exercise, though. Start with a little walking, first around the house and then, weather permitting, outside. Go a little farther each day. You can do some stretching exercises or low impact aerobics. This will help your muscles stay flexible. Start with five or ten minutes of gentle stretching, after a few days you may increase to light exercise and then gradually increase to full exercise after 4 weeks (laparoscopy) or 8 weeks (open). Each person's body is different, so it isn't possible to tell you exactly how much exercise you should be doing, but you should get some exercise. It will help you heal and it will make you feel better. Listen to your body and don't over do it. You'll know the next morning if you've done too much.

Should I be on a special diet?

You don't need a special diet after kidney donation. Like everyone, you should eat a healthy diet with lots of fruits and vegetables and avoid too much fat and protein. You may drink alcohol, but do so moderately.

When can I go back to work?

Depending on the type of work you do, you may return to work as early as three weeks (if your kidney was removed laparoscopically) or six weeks after your surgery (open flank). If your work requires you to lift heavy weights (over 25 pounds) you should plan to lift only lighter weights at first and then gradually increase your lifting over four to six weeks. If you need a letter for your employer about this please let us know and we can provide one.

How long will I have pain?

Because each person responds in a unique way to surgery and pain, it is impossible to tell you how long you will need pain medication. Most kidney donors need pain medication for a few weeks after surgery. No medication can take away all of the pain, but it should take the edge off of the pain so that you can do what you need to do. The pain will gradually decrease, but you may notice pulling, soreness and some spasms in the muscles of your back for a few months after surgery. This is part of the normal healing process.

What about sex?

You should wait at least two to three weeks after your surgery. You may want to try non-intercourse sexual activities for a while. Listen to your body and don't over do it.

Does my incision need special care?

Although you will be ready to return to your full activities within a few weeks of your surgery, your incision will still be healing for about three months. During this time, new skin cells are growing and old cells are being removed. This process will leave a visible line on your skin. This line will be more noticeable if you expose it to sun during the first year following your surgery. You can swim and do other activities in the sun, but you should wear a shirt or cover-up and/or use sun block to keep the sun off of the incision. It may be helpful to apply vitamin E cream to the incision line once a day, but you should not do this for three weeks after your surgery.

When can I drive a car?

You should not drive a car while you are taking pain medication. You should wait at least 3 weeks before you drive, but you may need to wait longer depending on how you feel. The pain and soreness that you will feel may make you less able to drive safely.

Who should I call if I have problems?

If you have any questions or problems call the kidney transplant nurse coordinators at 708/216-3454. You can call this number anytime, day or night. If you call after 5:00 p.m. or on weekends, you will be connected to the Loyola Physicians' Answering Service. Ask to speak to the renal transplant nurse coordinator. If necessary, she will be able to get you in touch with your surgeon.

A word about rejection.

Living donor kidney transplants are the most successful type of transplant. Even after a living-related transplant, special medication is needed to keep your loved one's immune system from fighting against the kidney. Too much of this medication can lead to infection. Too little of the medication can leave the immune system open to fight against the kidney. We try to keep a balance, using enough, but not too much of the medication. Sometimes, even with the medications, the immune system will fight against the kidney. This is called a rejection episode. **Rejection does not mean that the kidney is lost.** Almost all rejection episodes can be stopped using more immunosuppression medication. It is not rare for living-related kidney recipients to have a rejection episode. That's why we watch kidney recipients so closely. When a rejection episode is discovered, your loved one may be treated in the hospital.

When a rejection episode happens, sometimes kidney donors find themselves feeling bad. Some donors ask themselves if they caused the rejection episode. Some donors fear that the kidney will be lost. Some wonder if their gift has been wasted. These are all normal worries. The important thing to remember is that rejection episodes are not rare and they are almost always reversed with medication. If you find yourself wondering about this or feeling bad about the transplant, please talk to your surgeon or one of the kidney transplant nurse coordinators.

Is there anything I should watch for?

You will notice several changes after your surgery. You will have pain in the area of your incision. This will gradually go away, but you may feel some pulling, cramping or tightness in the incision area for several weeks after the surgery. Don't be afraid to use the pain medication you were given. If you notice that you are running out of the medication and need more, call the kidney transplant nurse coordinators.

You will probably feel a little weaker and more sore a day or two after you leave the hospital. This is normal. Most kidney donors find themselves wanting to be up and around once they get home. You should gradually increase your activity, but don't over do it. Listen to your body. If you are feeling more pain, take more time to rest and cut down a little on your walking or exercise.

Even though you are gradually feeling better, don't be surprised if you feel as if you don't have enough energy. It may take up to three to four months after kidney surgery to feel completely back to normal.

You may have strange sensations around your incision. You might notice burning, numbness or just very faint sensation. This is caused by the incision and it is normal. It will go away as the nerves grow back together. This could take several months. If you have bothersome sensations or pain which don't improve, call your surgeon or the nurse coordinators.

If you have fevers, nausea or vomiting, shortness of breath, a sudden increase in pain or anything else that seems out of the ordinary, please call your surgeon or the nurse coordinators at any time at 708/216-3454.

When do I come back to the clinic?

You have an appointment to see

Dr. _____

at _____ on _____

at _____

If you have problems, questions or worries before your clinic appointment, please call your surgeon or the nurse coordinators.

David R. Holt, M.D.
David A. Hatch, M.D.
John Brems, M.D.
Robert C. Flanigan, M.D.
Division of Renal Transplantation
Loyola University Medical Center
2160 S. First Avenue
Maywood, IL 60153

Office: 708/216-3454
Mary Kay Larson, R.N. 708/216-3453
Billie Kostro, R.N. 708/216-4920
Denise San Juan, Senior Secretary 708/216-3454
Appointments:
Central Scheduling (all clinics) 708/216-8563
Oakbrook Terrace 630/953-6600
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