

Chapter 2: Recovery in the Hospital and at Home

What to Expect in the Hospital

After surgery

- You will be moved to the kidney floor of the hospital.
- You will be in the hospital for about 4 to 7 days depending on your recovery.
- You will have a heart monitor to closely watch your heart. It will be removed before you go home.
- You will have a Foley catheter in your bladder for several days. This will help you heal as well as let your health care team check how much urine you are making.
- You will get up in a chair and walk as soon as possible.
- You can expect some pain from the surgery site. Your pain control is important to your recovery so you will have pain medications if you need. Talk with your doctor if your pain is not under control.
- You will receive education about your transplant, recovery and follow-up.

Education

You are an active member of your health care team. During your hospital stay you have started your physical recovery and learned a lot about your after care. Members of your transplant team have started to teach you about the following:

- medication names, purpose, doses, side effects, and when and how to make adjustments
- possible complications and how to watch for them
- lab test values and what they mean
- returning to your everyday activities
- routine and follow-up doctor or Kidney Transplant Clinic visits.

There will be many things to learn and guidelines to follow. Ask a member of your transplant team if you have any questions or concerns about any part of your transplant after care.

Incision care

Your incision will remain covered for 1 to 3 days after surgery. The dressing needs to stay clean, dry and remain in place. If you have any drainage, the nurse will replace the dressing.

Tell your nurse or doctor if you have any of the following at the incision site:

- redness
- swelling
- pain
- warmth
- drainage.

After the dressing is removed, watch for signs of infection (drainage, redness, warmth) or any problems with healing. Call your transplant coordinator if you notice any problems or have concerns.

If you have staples, they will be removed about 3 weeks after surgery in the Kidney Transplant Clinic. Staples will usually be removed over the course of a few days.

If you have Steri-Strips[®], let them to fall off on their own. Do not pull off Steri-Strips.

Supplies you need before you leave the hospital

You will need to check and record your blood pressure several times a day, temperature twice a day and weight once every morning. If you have diabetes, you will also need to check your blood glucose as directed by your doctor. Use the logs in the “Home Monitoring” section in the back of the binder.

Make sure you have the following items before you leave the hospital and make sure they work:

- bathroom scale
- glucometer and diabetes supplies (if needed)
- accurate blood pressure cuff
- digital thermometer.

Medications

You will also be responsible for keeping track of and taking your medications.

On the day you leave the hospital (discharge), you will get a 1 month supply of your new medications.

Some medications that you were taking before transplant may be too soon to fill and you will need to use your home supply. Your transplant coordinator will talk to you about this at discharge.

Your transplant coordinator will help you organize your medications before you leave the hospital. You will bring your medications, pill boxes and medication list to your first appointment for education and set-up.

Before you leave the hospital you should know:

- the names of your medications and why you are taking each one
- how to take them
- when to take them
- how to use your medication list to set up your medications.

Recovery at Home After Surgery

Activity restrictions and general guidelines

- Do not lift anything heavier than 10 pounds for 8 weeks. Your nephrologist and transplant coordinator will talk with you about any other lifting restrictions.
- Start walking as soon as possible. You will be able to increase the distance you walk every day as you recover from surgery.
- Stop doing any activity that causes you pain or discomfort.
- Do not drive until your nephrologist says it's OK.
- Do not smoke. Smoking slows your body's ability to heal. Ask your transplant coordinator if you need help quitting.
- Get enough sleep.

Diet

- Eat a well-balanced diet low in fat, cholesterol and added sugar.
- If you have diabetes, follow your diabetes diet. Follow any special directions you receive from your doctor.
- If you have questions about nutrition and meal planning, talk with the transplant dietitian.
- See page 65 to learn more.

Discomfort

The right pain control can help:

- you be more comfortable
- you get back to your normal routine
- promote healing.

Take pain medication when pain first begins. If you know your pain may get worse with activity, take your pain medication before the activity. Don't wait for pain to get worse before taking medication. Pain pills may take up to 30 minutes to work.

Hygiene

- Do not take a bath until the incision is healed.
- You may take a shower.
- Pat the incision area with a clean, dry towel.

Travel

- Check with your nephrologist before making travel plans.
- You should not travel for more than 3 or 4 days at a time until your doctor tells you it is OK to take longer trips.
- Most, but not all, complications such as rejection or infection occur within the first 6 months after surgery. It is important you are near your transplant team if you have complications.

Compliance

Taking medications, getting labs done and going to follow-up appointments are important for good results after transplant. Your transplant team members will work with you to help you understand instructions.

Ask if you do not understand. The better you understand, the more likely you will be to follow instructions and have good results.