

# Having a kidney transplant: Going home after the operation



## Information for patients

Sheffield Kidney Institute (Renal Unit)



**PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST





This booklet explains how to look after yourself when you go home after your kidney transplant operation. If you follow the advice in this booklet it will help to keep you healthy and your kidney working well.

We hope we have answered all your questions but if you want to know more then please contact us. We explain how to do this at the end of the booklet.

## **Will I have to attend clinic?**

After your kidney transplant you will need to come to the Sorby Renal Outpatients Department at the Northern General Hospital regularly.

At first, this will be three times a week, usually on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

When you come to the outpatient clinic you will:

- Have your blood tested
- Have your urine tested
- Have the tablets and other medicines you take reviewed
- Be examined by a doctor

You **must** wait for the results of your blood tests or to see a doctor. This can take 2 - 4 hours.

You **must not** take your tacrolimus (also called Adoport) before coming to the clinic as they will interfere with some of the blood test results. But, **you must** bring your tacrolimus with you and take them after your blood tests have been done.

As time goes by, you may be able to come to the clinic less often. The follow up will become twice a week, then once a week, then once a fortnight and so on. This will depend on:

- How well your kidney is working
- What changes are needed to the tablets and medicines you take

## **When do I transfer back to the Doncaster hospital renal team?**

It may be that before your kidney transplant you were looked after by the renal team at Doncaster Royal Infirmary. You will be able to transfer your care back to Doncaster when:

- Your kidney is working
- Your blood results are stable
- The doctors feel it is safe to transfer your care

You can discuss this in more detail when you visit Sorby Renal Outpatients department.

## **What if I do not have transport for clinic?**

Transport can be provided for your clinic appointments for up to 6 weeks after your operation. Please let the ward staff know if you need transport for your appointment.

**You will need to use your normal transport for any further clinic appointments after 6 weeks.**

## When I get home what do I have to monitor?

When you go home you must check some observations and bring the results with you when you come to clinic.

- Twice a day you **must** take your blood pressure and write it down. You will need a blood pressure machine to do this.
- Twice a day you **must** take your pulse and write it down. Most blood pressure machines also record your pulse.
- Twice a day you **must** take your temperature and write it down. You will need a thermometer to do this.
- Once a day you **must** weigh yourself and write it down. You will need some weighing scales at home to do this.
- You **must** record the amount that you drink and the amount of urine (water) you pass each day.

You **must** carry on doing these observations for 4 weeks after your kidney transplant operation. You will have been given another booklet 'Recording observations for renal patients' where you can record these results.

If you notice something wrong on a day when you are not coming to clinic, you **must** telephone the renal unit **straight away**. We explain how to do this at the end of the booklet.

## Where do I get this equipment from?

Blood pressure machines, thermometers and weighing scales are not provided by the renal unit. You or your family need to buy these and be able to use them before you can go home from hospital.

Most large chemists such as Boots or Lloyds sell these. An automatic blood pressure machine is better as they are simpler to use and also record your pulse.

## How do I look after my new kidney?

- Look at your wound site regularly and wash it gently every day. Avoid wearing tight fitting clothes around it. If it becomes red, swollen or you notice liquid coming out of it you **must** ring the renal unit **straight away**.
- Pass water (urinate) regularly to reduce the risk of getting a water (urine) infection.
- You may be asked to drink 2 - 3 litres of fluid every day to make sure your kidney works well but some patients may be given a fluid restriction by the doctor.
- Avoid heavy lifting, pushing or pulling for at least 6 weeks after your transplant.

## Do I have to change my diet?

- It is important to eat a well-balanced diet to help you stay healthy. The renal dieticians have written a leaflet "Healthy eating with your kidney transplant". Please read the leaflet and follow the advice.
- The renal dietitians will see you in the first few weeks when you come to the Sorby Renal outpatients department.
- **Don't** take any vitamins or herbal remedies, unless prescribed by your doctor. They can affect some of the medications you take.
- Check with your doctor before drinking any alcohol. You can get more information about safe alcohol levels from:  
[www.nhs.uk/livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholhome.aspx)

## When can I go back to work?

You **must** check with your doctor before going back to work. This will depend on:

- How well your kidney is working
- How often you need to come to clinic for follow up

Once your kidney is working well and you do not need changes to the tablets and medicines you are taking, you should be able to return to work. This is usually between 6 weeks and 3 months after the operation.

## What about sex?

- It is best to wait 6 weeks before having sex. You may prefer to wait longer until you feel you are fully recovered from your operation.
- If you are having sex you will need to take precautions against sexually transmitted diseases.
- After a kidney transplant operation many women start having periods again so you **must** use a contraceptive so you do not become pregnant. If you want to have a baby you **must** talk about this with your doctor **before** you get pregnant.
- Several medications you are taking can cause harm to an unborn baby. These drugs cannot be taken when you are pregnant but you **must only** stop taking these drugs when the doctor says you can.
- Men who had erection problems before the transplant may still have problems afterwards. We know this can be embarrassing to talk about but it is possible to get help with this problem. Contact your GP for an appointment.

## How else can I keep myself well?

- Wear a sun screen on all uncovered parts of your body when you go out. This **must** be **factor 50**. The reason you need to do this is that your tablets and medicines increase the risk of you developing skin cancer. There is more advice on staying safe in the sun from: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/sunscreen-and-sun-safety/>
- If you are planning a trip abroad you **must** tell staff at the renal unit. Some types of injections may not be suitable for you now you have had a kidney transplant. Your GP or practice nurse can get advice from the transplant doctors at the renal unit.
- Visit an optician each year as some medication can increase the risk of getting eye problems such as cataracts and glaucoma.
- Look after your teeth and gums to reduce the risk of infections. Brush and floss your teeth twice a day and visit a dentist every 6 months. You must tell your dentist about your kidney transplant as you may need antibiotics after some types of treatment.
- Gentle exercise is recommended to improve your general health and reduce the chance of putting on weight. Six months after your transplant you should be able to take part in any type of physical exercise or sports.
- Don't drive until you are told by your doctor.
- Where possible you should avoid public places for 3 months after your transplant to reduce the risk of infection.
- Have the flu vaccine each year - but you **must** wait 3 months after your transplant before having the vaccine. You must not have a "live" vaccine - the nasal spray type of vaccine is live - so you **must** have the injection. We have another leaflet that explains about flu vaccination in more detail. Please ask if you would like a copy.

After a transplant it is common to feel very tearful and have a low mood, which can get worse if it is ignored. If at any time after your transplant

you feel it would be helpful to talk things over please contact your GP for an appointment, and you may be referred to a counsellor.

## Infection

### Why do I have to be careful about infection?

After your kidney transplant you need to take tablets and medicines for the rest of your life. Some of these are called immunosuppressants and lower your immune system to prevent your body rejecting the kidney. One of the side effects of these kinds of drugs is that you will be less able to fight off illnesses and diseases caused by germs such as bacteria, viruses and fungus.

As your body is at a greater risk from infection it is important that you:

- Do what you can to reduce this risk
- Can recognise when an infection is starting to develop

If you think that an infection is starting, you **must** contact Sorby Outpatients Renal Assessment Unit (during working hours) or Renal F ward **straight away**. We explain how to do this at the end of this booklet. You may be advised to come to the hospital for treatment at once.

### How do I know if I have an infection?

The most common sign of infection is a raised temperature. As you should be monitoring your temperature twice a day this should be easy to spot.

If your temperature rises above **37.8°C** you **must** contact the renal unit **straight away**.

## **What are the symptoms of a urine infection?**

The most common infection in patients that have had a kidney transplant is a urine (water) infection. This is sometimes called a urinary tract infection or UTI for short.

If you are developing a urine infection you may notice that:

- Your urine (water) is cloudy or blood stained
- You feel a burning or stinging sensation when you pass urine
- You pass smaller amounts of urine
- You need to pass urine more often
- You find it difficult to pass urine despite feeling you need to
- Your urine smells stronger

## **How do I stop a urine infection?**

You can help stop a urine infection from developing by:

- Drinking plenty of fluids
- Passing water regularly even if you don't feel you need to (don't go more than 4 - 6 hours without passing water)
- Passing water before and after sex
- Not using bubble baths
- Wearing cotton under wear

## **What else can I do to reduce the risk of getting an infection?**

- After your operation you will be started on medicines to reduce your risk of infection and it is very important that you carry on taking them until you are told by your doctor to stop taking them. If you are not sure about when to take them, please ask.
- Wash your hands regularly especially before and after preparing food.
- The renal dieticians have written a booklet on storing and cooking food safely. Read the booklet and follow the advice at all times.
- Wash any cuts or bruises straight away and contact your GP if they become red or inflamed.
- Don't go near people who are ill (for example, with chicken pox).
- Avoid large crowds if at all possible.
- Don't clean out cat litter trays and bird cages. Wear a mask if you can't avoid doing this.
- Avoid dusty places.
- Wear gloves if you are gardening.
- Never share razors or toothbrushes.
- Be alert for any flu like symptoms, for example tiredness, dizziness, headaches, chills or vomiting.
- Wear a verucca sock if you go to the swimming baths to reduce the risk of catching a verucca. These are available at most chemists.

# Rejection

## What is kidney rejection?

Rejection is when the body's immune system tries to destroy something it sees as foreign, such as the kidney transplant.

After your transplant, you will be given tablets and medicines to help stop your body rejecting the kidney. But in spite of taking the tablets and medicines, there is a small risk that your body may still try to reject the transplant kidney.

A rejection episode can happen at any time but there is a higher risk of this happening in the first 3 months of having your kidney transplant. If rejection occurs, you will need more treatment such as:

- A change to the tablets and medicines you take
- A kidney biopsy

Most rejection episodes can be successfully treated.

## What are the signs of rejection?

- Flu like symptoms, for example fatigue, dizziness, headaches, chills and vomiting.
- Fever
- Any signs of fluid retention such as rapid weight gain or swollen ankles.
- High blood pressure
- Passing less urine (water)
- Most rejection episodes have no symptoms and are picked up in the outpatients department.

If you notice any of these things happening to you, you **must** contact the renal unit **straight away**. We explain how to do this at the end of the leaflet.

# Removing your stent

## What is a stent?

A stent is a small plastic tube that is usually put into the ureter during the transplant operation.

The ureter is the tube that carries the urine (water) made in your new kidney to your bladder.

The ureter came with the donor kidney and was joined to your bladder during the transplant operation. The stent was placed inside the ureter to stop the ureter from becoming blocked while the join with your bladder was healing.

Sometimes there can be mild side-effects from having a stent. These include:

- An increased chance of developing an infection
- Needing to pass urine more often
- Needing to rush to pass urine (called urgency)
- Discomfort or pain

For these reasons, the stent needs to be removed. This will be about 6 weeks after your kidney transplant once the join between the ureter and bladder has healed.

The procedure is usually done under local anaesthetic. This means you will be awake during the operation but will not feel any pain.

You will get a letter in the post telling you the date of the stent removal. You will also be given a leaflet 'Having a ureteric stent removed: Information for kidney transplant patients'.

## Where can I find further information?

Kidney Care UK. This website gives more information about kidney care and support.

- [www.kidneycareuk.org](http://www.kidneycareuk.org)

Sheffield Area Kidney Association. This is a registered charity which is designed to help people cope with kidney disease.

- [www.saka.org.uk](http://www.saka.org.uk)

The NHS website answers basic health questions and gives advice on your general health.

- [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## Who should I contact if I have any concerns?

Remember, if you become unwell, your observations change or are unusual, or you are concerned about your transplant you **must** contact the Renal Unit.

Sorby Renal Outpatients (Renal Assessment Unit):

- **0114 271 5320**

Monday to Thursday 8:30am - 4.00pm

Friday 8.30am - 3.30 pm

At all other times (including bank holidays) contact:

Renal F Floor:

- **0114 226 6391**
- **0114 271 5886**





**Sheffield  
Hospitals  
Charity**

To help support your local hospitals visit  
**[sheffieldhospitalscharity.org.uk](https://sheffieldhospitalscharity.org.uk)**

Registered Charity No. 1165762



**Yes I donate**  
ORGAN DONATION

**Alternative formats can be available on request.  
Please email: [sth.alternativeformats@nhs.net](mailto:sth.alternativeformats@nhs.net)**

**© Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust 2020**

Re-use of all or any part of this document is governed by copyright and the "Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005" SI 2005 No. 1515. Information on re-use can be obtained from the Information Governance Department, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals. Email [sth.infogov@nhs.net](mailto:sth.infogov@nhs.net)