

1

What are my kidneys supposed to do?

What is kidney disease?

2

What is kidney failure and what are its 3 leading causes?

Why did my kidneys fail?

3

What are the treatment options for kidney failure?

You may already know a lot about your kidney disease and your treatment options, or you may be interested to learn more. Take a moment to quickly review or get familiar with the basics.

Kidney basics, understanding why your kidney failed, and treatment options

What are my kidneys supposed to do?

Kidneys are small organs on the left and right side of the spine that remove waste and extra fluid from the blood. Kidneys also make pee, control blood pressure, and help keep bones healthy.







What is kidney disease?

Kidney disease, also called chronic kidney disease (CKD), happens when your kidneys are damaged and don't work well. When kidneys work poorly, waste builds up to unsafe levels in your body. This increases your chance for a heart attack and can be life threatening. The most common symptoms of kidney disease are:

- Confusion
- Nausea and vomiting
- Unusual itching
- Metallic or bad taste in mouth
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling very weak or tired

There are different stages of CKD (1-5). Stage 5 is kidney failure.

Stages of chronic kidney disease

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3a	Stage 3b	Stage 4	Stage 5
Protein in the urine and normal kidney function	Protein in the urine with mild loss of kidney function	Mild to moderate loss of kidney function	Moderate to severe loss of kidney function	Severe loss of kidney function	Kidney failure
					
eGFR 90 or higher	89-60	59-45	44-30	29-15	less than 15
90% kidney function	60-89% kidney function	45-59% kidney function	30-44% kidney function	15-29% kidney function	less than 15% kidney function

eGFR (ml/min/1.73m²)

What is kidney failure and what are its 3 leading causes?

Kidney failure, also called end-stage kidney disease (ESKD), happens when your kidneys can no longer support your body. This means you must start dialysis or get a transplant to survive. The three most common causes of kidney failure are:

1. Diabetes
2. High blood pressure
3. Polycystic kidney disease
(a genetic disease where non-cancerous fluid-filled sacs grow on the kidneys)

Why did my kidneys fail?

Knowing what led to your kidney failure is vital. That way, you can choose the right treatment and make any lifestyle changes to protect your new kidney if you receive a transplant. You may know that one of the three leading causes contributed to your kidney failure. If not, it's a good idea to ask your nephrologist what led to your kidney disease and kidney failure.

What are the treatment options for kidney failure?

You have 2 treatment options, dialysis or transplant. There are pros and cons to both treatments, so you will want to get familiar with each before making your decision.

Dialysis



A filtering machine or special fluid removes waste from your body. It comes in two forms:

Hemodialysis:

A machine cleans your blood at either a dialysis center several times a week, or at home every day or night.

Peritoneal dialysis:

A fluid is put in your belly to clean your body and then removed several times a day and overnight.

Transplant



There are 2 major types of kidney transplants:

Living donor kidney transplant:

A surgery where doctors put a kidney from a living person into someone whose kidneys no longer work. Sometimes the living donor is someone you know, but there is also an option called Kidney Paired Donation. This is where you may receive a kidney from a stranger who is a good match for you.

Deceased donor kidney transplant:

A surgery where doctors put a kidney from someone who has died into someone whose kidneys no longer work.

A transplanted kidney can do 50-85% of what a normal kidney does. Regardless of which type of transplant you choose, compared to dialysis patients, transplant recipients tend to live longer, have more energy, more freedom to travel, and can eat and drink more freely.

Use this table to help you compare the two types of transplants:

Living donor kidney transplant	Deceased donor kidney transplant
Wait time varies, often < one year if patient has a living donor identified	Average wait time is 4-10 years depending on blood type. <i>O Blood Group: 10 years</i> <i>B Blood Group: 8-10 years</i> <i>A Blood Group: 6-8 years</i> <i>AB Blood Group: 4-6 years</i>
A surgery where doctors put a kidney from a living person into someone whose kidneys no longer work	A surgery where doctors put a kidney from someone who has died into someone whose kidneys no longer work
Kidneys usually last 15-20 years	Kidneys usually last 10-15 years
Transplant can happen within a year of finding a donor who matches	Patient typically has to wait many years for a transplant
Patients spend less time on dialysis, which means fewer health problems	Patients must spend more time on dialysis, which can cause more health problems

Doctors have been doing transplants using living donors for over 50 years. A living donor transplant is the best option for many people because the transplants from living donors last longer than from donors who have died. People who decide to have a living donor transplant wait the shortest amount of time and get a kidney that has the best chance of working the longest.

On average, most patients in California wait 5-10 years on the deceased donor waiting list, but it varies by blood type. Sometimes a matching kidney is never found. Your best chance to get a transplant is to both wait for a deceased donor transplant and consider living donation.

To help you decide about the best treatment option for you, here is a side-by-side comparison:

	Pros	Cons
Dialysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Life-sustaining <input type="checkbox"/> Don't have to change treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Many hours spent on dialysis <input type="checkbox"/> Can have dialysis-related health problems
Deceased donor transplant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Don't have to find a living donor <input type="checkbox"/> Will feel better with a functioning kidney <input type="checkbox"/> Will have more time and freedom without dialysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Have to wait many years to find a matching kidney from the waiting list <input type="checkbox"/> May die before matching kidney becomes available
Living donor transplant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Lasts longer than a deceased donor kidney <input type="checkbox"/> Could happen sooner than a deceased donor transplant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Living donors may have financial burdens, such as missing work <input type="checkbox"/> May not find a living donor

If transplant sounds like the right option for you, continue on to the next section to learn more about how to start your transplant journey.