



“Your Journey to a Strong, Healthy Transplant”

THE KIDNEY TRANSPLANT PATIENT WORKBOOK

Copyright Notice & Publication Information

Kidney Strong, LLC

Founded in 2024

© 2024–2025 Kidney Strong, LLC. All rights reserved.

This patient workbook (the “Workbook”) and all content within it—including text, charts, tables, graphics, illustrations, layouts, designs, frameworks, checklists, and downloadable/printable materials—are the intellectual property of Kidney Strong, LLC and are protected by United States and international copyright laws.

No part of this Workbook may be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, displayed, stored in a retrieval system, or translated in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of Kidney Strong, LLC, except for limited use consistent with applicable “fair use” laws.

Permitted Use (Personal/Clinical):

You may print or photocopy pages for **individual personal use** or **use in a direct patient-care setting** (e.g., a clinician providing a copy to a specific patient) provided the content is not altered and all copyright notices remain intact.

Prohibited Use:

You may not resell, license, post publicly online, upload to shared drives/groups, distribute to classes or organizations, or use this Workbook (or portions of it) to create derivative products without express written permission.

No Guarantees:

Health outcomes vary by person. Kidney Strong, LLC makes no guarantees regarding results from use of this Workbook.

Trademarks:

“Kidney Strong” and all related marks, logos, and product names are trademarks or service marks of Kidney Strong, LLC. All other trademarks referenced are the property of their respective owners.

Contact for Permissions:

Permissions requests and licensing inquiries:

Kidney Strong, LLC

www.kidneystronger.com

First edition: 2025

Printed in the United States of America

Medical Disclaimer:

This Workbook is provided for educational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult your healthcare professional regarding your specific medical condition, medications, and dietary needs. Do not ignore or delay seeking medical advice because of something you read in this Workbook. If you think you may have a medical emergency, call 911 or your local emergency number.



THE KIDNEY
TRANSPLANT PATIENT
WORKBOOK

SECTION 1: Understanding Kidney Transplantation

1.1 What is a Kidney Transplant?

- Definition and purpose
- Difference between living donor and deceased donor transplants
- Why transplant is considered the best treatment for kidney failure
- Common myths and truths about transplants

Kidney Transplant: The "Why" in One Page

For many eligible people with kidney failure, a transplant can mean longer life, freedom, and better day to day health than dialysis.



Live Longer

- Lower risk of death vs staying on dialysis.
- Mini-stat: USRDS reports markedly lower mortality for transplant recipients vs dialysis



Get Your Time Back

- Freedom from a dialysis schedule.
- No 3x weekly chair time,
- fewer "crash days"
- More flexibility for work, family, and travel.



Feel Better Day to Day

A working kidney generally filters/waste and balances fluids/electrolytes more like a natural kidney.



Fewer Diet & Fluid Limits (for many)

- More normal eating/drinking-still heart-healthy
- Many transplant recipients have fewer restrictions.



Better Quality of Life

- More life participation.
- Improved life quality and participation have in daily activities.



Often Lower Long-Treatment Cost

Lower cost over time vs chronic dialysis. Commonly linked to lower overall treatment cost.

Reality Check

- A transplant is powerful, but it's not "set it and forget it." Surgery + recovery and close follow-up are required.
- Lifelong immunosuppression is typical → higher infection and some cancer risks (your team manages prevention/screening).
- Some problems can persist or appear (BP, diabetes, weight, rejection risk).

1.2 The Benefits

- Better quality of life and energy levels
- Freedom from dialysis
- Improved longevity
- Fewer dietary and fluid restrictions (with guidance)

1.3 The Risks

- Rejection and infection
- Side effects of immunosuppressive medications
- Need for lifelong follow-up

Reflection Prompt: What do I hope will change most in my life after a successful transplant?

SECTION 2: The Evaluation and Waiting Process

2.1 The Evaluation Process

- Medical tests (blood work, imaging, cardiac testing, etc.)
- Psychological and social evaluation
- Financial and insurance counseling
- The importance of full transparency and honesty with the team

Kidney Transplant Recipient Work-Up: Key Pieces (and why they matter)

This evaluation is a safety check + matching process—it helps the transplant team understand your health, support system, and insurance coverage, and decide if transplant is safe and appropriate.



Intake & Team Evaluation

- Review medical history, surgeries, meds, and overall risks
- Meet the core team (coordinator, nephrologist, surgeon, pharmacist, social worker, dietitian, financial counselor)

Goal: map out what testing is needed and what needs optimizing first



Matching & Immune System "Fingerprint"

- Blood type + HLA typing (tissue markers)
- Antibody screen (PRA): how "ready to reject" your immune system is
- Crossmatch (final compatibility check with a specific donor)

Why it matters: immunosuppression increases risk of cancer progression/recurrence, so the goal is to detect and treat early



Infections & Prevention

- Screening commonly includes hepatitis B/C, HIV, syphilis (treat/monitor first when needed)
- Vaccines are reviewed/updated before transplant when possible (because post-transplant immunosuppression blunts vaccine response and some live vaccines aren't used after transplant)
- Center-specific requirements may exist (timing and exact vaccines vary)

Goal: set you up to succeed long-term, not just "get through surgery"



Heart & Lung Clearance

- Typical testing may include EKG, echo, and sometimes stress testing
- Chest imaging (X-ray/scan) to check lungs (fluid, infection, other issues)

Purpose: lower surgical risk and reduce early post-transplant complications



Cancer Screening (age/risk-based)

- Screening commonly includes colon, breast, cervical, prostate, skin (and others based on history)

Why it matters: immunosuppression increases risk of cancer progression/recurrence, so the goal is to detect and treat early



Dental + Support & Financial Readiness

- Dental clearance to reduce risk of hidden infections flaring after transplant
- Social support plan + ability to follow complex meds/visits, insurance/cost review

Goal: set you up to succeed long-term, not just "get through surgery"

Reality Check: Committee review → "Approved / Deferred (needs optimization) / Not a candidate right now."
Many people are "deferred" for fixable items (weight goals, smoking cessation, infection healing, additional testing).

"Testing varies by transplant center and individual risk. Your team will tell you exactly which tests you need."

2.2 Being on the Waiting List

- How organ matching works (blood type, tissue type, antibodies)
- What can make the wait longer or shorter
- The importance of staying “active” on the list (keep tests current, report changes)

2.3 Staying Healthy While You Wait

- Managing blood pressure, diabetes, and infections
- Staying at a healthy weight
- Avoiding tobacco and substance use
- Keeping up with vaccinations and dental care

Checklist: Pre-Transplant To-Do

| Task | Due Date | Completed |
|---------------------------|----------|-----------|
| Dental clearance | | |
| Cardiac testing | | |
| Mammogram/ Colonoscopy | | |
| Lab testing (monthly) | | |
| Vaccinations | | |
| Nutrition counseling | | |

Preparing for Transplant: Mind Mind & Body

Optimize your physical and mental health while you wait on your transplant journey



Stay Physically Active

- Regular light exercise, such as walking, cycling as tolerated.
- If able, engage in resistance training during this period

Goal: Enter your care team for safe for possible.



Nurture Mental Health

- Connect with support groups/volunteer for the local chapter of the National Kidney Foundation
- Seek professional help if necessary



Optimize Nutrition

- Work with a dietitian or your physician
- Utilize programs, National Kidney Foundation
- Look into endorsed Kidney Healthy Cookbooks

Goal: Emotional resilience for if healing.



Avoid Harmful Harmful Habits

- Quit smoking
- Limit/avoid Alcohol
- Avoid illicit/recreational drugs



Be Medicaly Compliant

- Take meds exactly as prescribed,
- Keep all doctor and dialysis appointments
- Work on improving your dialysis labs
- Complete all required tests and blood work



Build Support System

- Work on communication with the transplant coordinator
- Utilize local transplant groups or local events from the National Kidney Foundation
- Set up a post-transplant recovery plan with help to get around and with medications

Important: Your transplant journey will be different from others. Do not expect for things to progress as someone else. There are numerous moving parts that you will see, and many more that are behind the scenes. Patience and constant communication are a must to stay on top of what needs to be done.

Sources: NIDDK, National Kidney Foundation, USRDS AST, UNOS

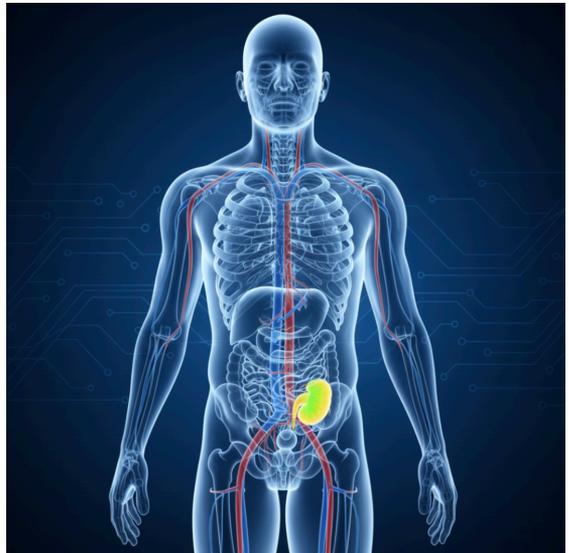
SECTION 3: The Surgery and Hospital Stay

3.1 The Day of Surgery

- What to bring to the hospital
- Who will be on your transplant team
- How the surgery is performed (brief, visual explanation)

3.2 Recovery in the Hospital

- Typical hospital stay (5–10 days)
- Common tubes and drains
- Pain management and walking early
- Learning your new medication routine
- Meeting with your transplant coordinator and pharmacist



SECTION 4: Life After Transplant

4.1 Understanding Your Medications

| Medication Name | Purpose | Time | Side Effects to Watch |
|-----------------|---------------------|------|---------------------------|
| Tacrolimus | Prevent rejection | | Tremor, headache |
| Mycophenolate | Prevent rejection | | Stomach upset |
| Prednisone | Reduce inflammation | | Weight gain, mood changes |

- Never skip doses
- Always check before taking new over-the-counter meds or supplements
- Keep a medication list with you at all times

4.2 Preventing Infection

- Wash hands often
- Avoid sick contacts
- Follow food safety rules (no raw sushi, unpasteurized dairy, etc.)
- Stay up-to-date on vaccines (with your transplant team's approval)

4.3 Nutrition After Transplant

- Eat balanced meals with lean protein, fruits, and vegetables
- Limit sodium and added sugar
- Stay hydrated, but follow team guidance
- Avoid grapefruit and pomegranate (can interact with meds)

4.4 Exercise & Recovery

- Start with light walking
- Gradually increase to 150 minutes/week of activity
- Avoid heavy lifting for 6–8 weeks
- Focus on muscle and core strength over time

4.5 Emotional and Social Health

- Mood swings are common after transplant
- Seek support from a social worker or counselor
- Join transplant support groups

SECTION 5: Long-Term Care and Red Flags

5.1 Ongoing Monitoring

- Regular clinic visits and labs (initially 2–3 times/week, then gradually less)
- Understanding your lab results (creatinine, tacrolimus level, WBC, etc.)
- Importance of communication with your team

5.2 Recognizing Trouble Early

| Symptom | Possible Concern | What to Do |
|------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| Fever >100.5 °F | Infection or rejection | Call transplant team |
| Decreased urine output | Graft issue | Call immediately |
| Sudden weight gain | Fluid retention | Report promptly |
| Pain over kidney area | Rejection or infection | Notify clinic |
| Blood in the urine | Rejection or infection | Call immediately |

5.3 Protecting Your Transplant for Life

- Stay consistent with appointments and medications
- Manage blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes
- Avoid NSAIDs unless cleared
- Stay positive and connected with your care team

SECTION 6: Late Reflection and Future Planning



Looking Back and Looking Ahead

- What has this journey taught me about myself?
- How has my perspective on health changed?
- How do I want to “give back” — advocacy, mentorship, or education?



My Transplant Anniversary Tracker

| Year | Goal for My Health This Year | Notes |
|------|------------------------------|-------|
| 1st | | |
| 2nd | | |
| 3rd | | |
| 4th | | |
| 5th | | |
| 6th | | |
| 7th | | |
| 8th | | |
| 9th | | |
| 10th | | |



Contact Information Page

- Transplant Coordinator: _____
- Pharmacy Contact: _____
- Surgeon: _____
- Social Worker: _____
- After-Hours Emergency Number: _____

Additional Information:

Closing Quote

“A transplant is not just a new kidney — it’s a new chance at life. Protect it, nurture it, and let it remind you of your resilience.”

— Andrew Kowalski, MD, FASN

About the Author

Andrew Kowalski, MD, MPH, FASN

Welcome to Kidney Strong!

I am a Chicago native working for a private group in the suburbs of Chicago. I went to medical school at St George's University School of Medicine. I completed my residency at the University of Illinois Chicago at Advocate Christ Hospital where I was also nominated to be Chief Resident.

Following my Chief year

I went on to complete a fellowship at Northwestern University in Nephrology and Hypertension. After I joined my group I was sent to be trained in Interventional Nephrology.

I am fortunate to be affiliated with a residency program where I share the wonders of nephrology. I have won numerous teaching awards and have been named one of Illinois' top doctors 2 years in a row. I now focus my energy in patient education and helping patients take control of their kidney disease and slow down its progression.

