

Transplant or Dialysis: Which is Best for Me?

You know you have Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD), yet you may not know if or when you'll be approaching the need for a transplant or dialysis. Overwhelmed by your diagnosis? Confused about looming health concerns and best options? You are not alone. We're here to help!

Understanding the Facts

You were provided facts about transplant and dialysis, but was it enough to give you the clarity you need to make a decision that could dramatically impact the quality of your life? Have you ever wondered about the benefits of trying to secure a transplant *before* you would ever need dialysis? Have you ever questioned if it may be best to wait until you get sicker before having to think about these decisions? Perhaps you've been under the impression that dialysis might be a whole lot easier than having to take immunosuppressive medications for the rest of your life? All of these thoughts can be confusing if you don't have *all* the facts.

Speaking of facts, let's start by looking at the difference between dialysis and transplant—starting with dialysis. While you may have been introduced to dialysis as it being a lifesaving treatment, it's important to know that dialysis only performs about 10 percent of the work of a functioning kidney transplant.

Dialysis is also extremely demanding on the body and over time it can cause issues like anemia, bone disease, high blood pressure, heart disease, nerve damage and a high propensity for infections. The process is also known to cause muscle cramping, itchy skin, low blood pressure and an overall exhausted feeling that can last for hours or days on end.

Choosing A Longer & Better Quality of Life

The average life expectancy for a patient on dialysis is generally five years. Patients who can avoid dialysis (or minimize how long they will require dialysis) generally live a longer and less cumbersome life post-transplant. For example, patients who get a kidney transplant before dialysis is required (known as a preemptive kidney transplant) live an average of 10 to 15 years longer¹ than if they had stayed on dialysis.

While younger adults tend to benefit more than older adults after a kidney transplant, a 75-year old transplant recipient can gain an average of four additional years when they choose to secure a transplant instead of staying on dialysis.¹

The most undervalued misconception about transplant has to do with the timing of when to schedule the surgery. Without question, a preemptive (before dialysis) transplant offers the best outcome. Yet, when a patient needs to be on dialysis while waiting for a donated kidney, the goal is to spend less time on dialysis to reduce potential health problems. For example, transplanted kidneys work longer in patients who were transplanted before dialysis was required. *(Patients who wait for a transplant on dialysis for two years, are three times more likely to lose their transplanted kidney than those patients who wait less than six months on dialysis).*¹



1. <https://www.bidmc.org/centers-and-departments/transplant-institute/kidney-transplant>