

## Living Kidney Donation Surgery: Patient Discharge Instructions

This handout provides helpful information to help you as you recover from kidney donation surgery. Be sure to follow all other guidelines from your physician or nurse.

*If you have  
any questions  
or concerns,  
please call the  
Transplant Clinic  
at 312.695.8900.*

### **Contact information**

You may contact the Northwestern Memorial Hospital Organ Transplant Clinic 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at **312.695.8900 (TTY: 711)**.

- During business hours (8 am to 5 pm Monday through Friday), please ask for the donor transplant nurse coordinator.
- For urgent issues during non-business hours, please ask to page the on-call nurse.

### **Follow-up appointments**

You will get a list of all of your follow-up appointments before your discharge. It is very important that you go to your follow-up appointments even if you feel well. In general, your follow-up appointments will be 1 week, 6 months, 12 months and 24 months after donation. If you did not receive a list of follow-up appointments, lost this list or need to reschedule, please call the Transplant Clinic.

## When to contact your care team

Call your physician or transplant nurse coordinator if you have any of the following:

- Temperature more than 101.0 degrees F
- Chills
- Swelling, redness or increased warmth of your skin
- Bloating in your abdomen (belly) for more than 2 weeks
- Changes in the color, smell or amount of drainage from your incision
- More tenderness or soreness around the wound
- More redness or swelling in the wound
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or constipation that does not go away within 48 hours
- Inability to urinate
- Pain that is not controlled by the medication your physician ordered

**If you need medical help and are unable to contact your physician, go to the nearest emergency room.**

## **Incision care**

It is important to keep your incision (cut) clean and dry to prevent infection. This will help your incision heal. Follow these instructions to clean your incision **every day**:

1. Wash your hands before touching your incision.
2. Wash the wound gently with clean water and mild soap.
3. Do not soak the area.
4. Gently pat dry; do not rub.
5. Wash your hands after cleaning your incision.

Do not use lotions, creams or ointments on the wound unless your physician orders them. Wear comfortable clothing. Do not wear soiled or tight clothing over the wound. Leave the paper strips of tape (Steri-Strips™) on the skin over your incision until they fall off. These give you extra support as your incision heals. Your body will absorb the stitches. We do not need to take them out. You do not need a bandage over the incision. Some bruising around the wound is common.

Report these signs of infection to your physician:

- Increased redness, swelling or pain at the site
- Thick drainage or pus from the incision

## **Showering**

You may shower. Do not soak the incision site. Do not sit in a tub for a bath until your physician tells you that this is OK.

## **Activity**

You may slowly increase your activity. Try to get up and walk every 1 to 2 hours while you are awake. Rest if you get tired. Do not do hard physical activity, including heavy exercise, until you talk with your physician. Do not lift anything weighing more than a gallon of milk (less than 10 pounds) for 4 to 6 weeks.

Check with your physician or transplant nurse coordinator before you start driving. Most people can start driving 1 to 2 weeks after surgery. You should not drive while you are taking narcotic or prescription pain medication.

## **Sexual activity**

Many people have questions about sexual activity after surgery. If you feel good and are well rested, you can slowly resume sexual activity. Some positions may be more comfortable until the wound heals.

## Work

Most people take 4 to 8 weeks off work to recover. People whose jobs involve heavy physical work may be off work for a longer time. Please talk with your physician or transplant nurse coordinator about when you can go back to work.

## Diet

You may eat a regular diet as you are able. You can avoid health problems by keeping a healthy weight and following a diet low in salt and low in fat.

Follow these guidelines for a healthy kidney meal plan and lifestyle:

- Eat meals rich in fruits and vegetables (7 to 9 servings a day).
- Follow a low-salt diet.
- Avoid fad diets that are high in protein and protein supplements.
- Keep a healthy body weight.
- Avoid nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). Examples include ibuprofen (Advil®), aspirin and naproxen (Aleve®).
- Exercise regularly.
- Avoid smoking.

It is important to drink 8 to 10 glasses (64 to 80 ounces) of water each day.

Talk with your physician or transplant nurse coordinator before you start drinking alcohol. This includes:

- Beer
- Non-alcoholic beer
- Wine and wine coolers
- Liquor

You may feel constipated after surgery due to inactivity and narcotic pain medication. Avoid constipation by drinking plenty of fluids and staying active. Your physician may order a medication that helps constipation. Bowel function should return to normal within 1 week.

## Pain medication

It is common to have pain after surgery. You may feel discomfort from the incision and muscle aches. Getting up and moving around can help with some of the discomfort. Hold a pillow over your incision when you cough or sneeze.

Usually your physician will prescribe pain medication. Take your pain medication as ordered. Some medication may upset an empty stomach. To prevent nausea, take the medication with food. Never take narcotics on an empty stomach.

Call your physician if you have any of these side effects:

- Nausea or vomiting
- Headache
- Rash
- Drowsiness
- Dizziness
- Constipation

Some of your pain medication may have acetaminophen. Acetaminophen can cause liver damage if you take too much. Be sure to read labels carefully and check with your pharmacist about your medication. If you are taking acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for pain, do not take more than 3,000 milligrams (mg) in 24 hours. Norco® also contains acetaminophen (each tablet contains 325 mg). Check with your physician about the 24-hour limits that are right for you.

## **Bowel management**

When you leave the hospital, your physician will prescribe a stool softener for you. Even if you do not feel constipated, you should take this until your bowel movements are soft or loose. Pain from constipation can be severe. If you are having abdominal pain, please call the kidney donor nurses.

## **Stress and emotions**

It is common and even healthy for organ donors to have many different emotions about the donation process. Emotions may range from positive to negative, often in a very short period. This is a normal reaction to being an organ donor. Negative feelings may increase during times when the pain and medical symptoms are worse. Your feelings will improve as you are feeling better. Below is a list of common feelings you may have and how to deal with them.

### ***Sadness***

Sadness is a healthy emotion. But if sadness lasts longer than 2 weeks, it may be a sign of depression. Signs of depression may include the following.

- Loss of interest in activities that you used to enjoy
- Problems concentrating or forgetfulness
- Lack of motivation and being more tired
- Poor sleep or changes in sleep pattern
- Loss of appetite or big weight changes
- Feeling hopeless or guilty
- Tearfulness or crying spells
- Body aches and pains
- Irritability and anger

- Decreased sexual desire
- Withdrawing from others or low self-esteem
- Thoughts of harming yourself

Call the Transplant Clinic if you have some of these feelings for 2 weeks or longer. Please reach out to us right away if you are having any other disturbing thoughts or feelings.

### **Anxiety**

Fear and anxiety can happen when you worry about the unknown. To help with anxiety, try to stay focused on things that you can control. For example, you can control keeping your appointments, exercising and eating a healthy diet. It is important to keep a positive outlook.

### **Stress**

Chronic stress can strain your body systems and can cause damage over time. It is very important for those with a weakened immune system to limit stress. Try these ideas to help reduce stress:

- Get enough sleep.
- Avoid tobacco, alcohol and illegal drugs.
- Meditate through prayer or yoga.
- Do things that bring you joy and laughter.
- Relax by taking baths, listening to music or writing.
- Practice deep breathing exercises.

Please call your donor advocate at any time if you need support.

## **Living kidney donation: A patient handbook**

Please reference your patient education handbook that you got before surgery. If you do not have this handbook, ask for one from your nurse before discharge or call the Transplant Clinic.