

PATRICK DEAN: Hello, my name is Patrick Dean and I'm a kidney transplant surgeon at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

I'd like to take a few minutes to provide you some basic information about kidney transplantation. I'd like to focus on three main topics. First, we'll talk about the advantages of living donor kidney transplantation. Second, we'll discuss the operation itself, and third, we'll talk about how you can get yourself in as good a condition as possible to prepare for the transplant.

Now when we have the opportunity, we prefer to do a living donor kidney transplants. Of course, we realize that every transplant candidate doesn't have a suitable living kidney donor. However, the first and perhaps the most important reason we like to do living donor transplants is that they tend to last longer than a deceased donor, or what we used to call a cadaveric transplant. The average lifespan of a living donor kidney is approximately 14 years compared to nine years for a deceased donor kidney.

The second reason we prefer to do the living donor transplants is that we can often perform the transplant before you need dialysis. Not only does this avoid the inconvenience and expensive dialysis, but we also know that patients who are on dialysis for a long time before a transplant don't do as well as those who were never on dialysis. And the third major advantage of living donor transplantation is that it avoids the long waiting time for a deceased donor transplant. How long you wait will depend on your blood type, but it is not uncommon for patients to wait four to six years for a deceased donor kidney. And the majority of that time might be spent on dialysis.

Now I'd like to talk about the kidney transplant operation itself. The operation we do takes around three hours to do and most patients will spend three nights after the hospital after the operation. After you leave the hospital, we ask that you stay in Rochester for another two to three weeks. During this time, we keep a close eye on the function of your new kidney and on your overall health.

During the operation, we make an incision in the lower abdomen and place the new kidney there. In general, we don't disconnect or remove your old kidneys. They remain right where they are. So as with any operation on the abdomen there can be complications, but most of these can be dealt with. Your transplant surgeon will go over these in detail with you as the time for the transplant grows closer.

And lastly, I'd like to talk about how you can prepare yourself for the transplant operation to maximize your chances of a successful kidney transplant that will function for a long time. In general, just like anything else, the better shape you are in going into the operation the better shape you'll be coming out. If you're a smoker, please make every effort you can to stop smoking.

If you think you might need help to stop smoking, there are a variety of programs and medications we can prescribe to help you. Also, it is important to try to get close to a normal body weight. While losing weight can be quite difficult, doing so will decrease your chances of early complications such as hernias or infections following the operation and should help improve your overall long term outcome. Finally, try to increase your activity levels to get your heart and lungs in better shape so that you will recover more quickly from the operation.

Now I hope that this brief introduction to kidney transplantation has been helpful for you. If you have any questions about issues I haven't covered, please don't hesitate to contact your nephrologist or contact our transplant center to ask those questions. I wish you the best of luck in your transplant journey.