

Renal and transplant services

Diabetes after a kidney transplant

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet aims to tell you how diabetes may affect you if you are having a kidney transplant. It's not intended to replace the conversations you, or your loved one, have with your doctor and medical team. Please ask questions if you do not understand something.

What is diabetes?

Diabetes is a condition where your blood sugar (glucose) levels become too high. This happens because:

- your body cannot produce enough insulin, or
- or it does not respond to insulin

Insulin is a hormone that helps your body convert sugar into energy. Without enough insulin, sugar builds up in the bloodstream. This leads to health problems.

Having diabetes before a kidney transplant

If you have diabetes, it's important to have good blood sugar levels before a kidney transplant. This reduces the chance of problems after your operation. These could include infections and delayed wound healing. Poor sugar control can also affect the function of the transplanted kidney. High blood sugar levels can also increase your chances of heart disease.

So, having stable sugar levels before the transplant can:

- improve your health
- promote the long-term success of your transplant

Checking blood sugar levels

Glycated haemoglobin (HbA1c) is a way to assess your diabetes control. An HbA1c test measures your blood sugar levels over the past three months. Your diabetes care provider will check your HbA1c levels on a regular basis. They will:

- adjust your treatment according to the results
- set individual targets for you

It's a good idea to check your blood sugar levels yourself. You can use a finger prick glucose meter. You may also be able to get a continuous glucose meter, if appropriate.

The targets for people on dialysis are between 6-12 mmol/L.

Get advice from your GP or diabetes team about your targets. Tell them if your sugar levels remain high all the time.

Importance of a healthy lifestyle

Having a healthy lifestyle before and after your kidney transplant will help your recovery. So, while waiting for your kidney transplant, keep up-to-date and:

- attend your diabetes yearly screening appointments
- attend your yearly eye screening
- have your feet and legs checked at least once a year
- maintain good blood pressure control
- check your blood sugar levels at least once daily
- have your HbA1c checked by your GP at least twice a year
- take your diabetes medication as instructed
- have your blood fats measured. These include cholesterol and triglycerides
- if you smoke, get support and advice to help you quit. Speak to your GP or visit www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking
- get advice from a dietician about what you need to be eating and drinking
- do some physical activity for at least 30 minutes a day

Post-transplant diabetes (PTDM)

Some people who do not have diabetes may have high sugar levels after a kidney transplant. This may be a temporary, but it could become long term and lead to a diagnosis of post-transplant diabetes (PTDM). Your blood sugar levels will be checked often while you are still in hospital. Some people will require early treatment with insulin.

A PTDM diagnosis is usually confirmed around 6 weeks after your transplant.

What causes post-transplant diabetes?

A few factors can contribute to your chance of getting PTDM. These include:

- the medications vital to stop rejection of the kidney transplant. These include steroids and anti-rejection medicines, which much never be stopped
- being overweight
- being part of a certain ethnic group
- having a family history of type 2 diabetes

How to prevent post-transplant diabetes

Having a healthy lifestyle is important even if you do not have diabetes. But it's even more important if you have a higher risk of getting PTDM. You can:

- improve your overall health with diet and exercise
- lose some weight if you are overweight
- aim for good blood pressure control, based on your individual targets
- have a yearly screen for diabetes while waiting for your kidney transplant

Impact of diabetes on a kidney transplant

Long-term high sugar levels may harm your kidney transplant graft. So good sugar control is vital. Complications of diabetes can include:

- kidney damage
- long-term problems with eyes and nerves
- heart problems
- infections

Diabetes care and treatment after a kidney transplant

Managing your blood sugar after transplantation can be hard.

Often people require more diabetes medications. You may need diabetes tablets or insulin to manage your blood sugar.

Several diabetes medications cannot be taken if you have kidney failure and insulin is often required to stabilise your sugar levels early. If you are already on insulin, you may require higher dosages.

Your medical team will decide the best option for you. They will adjust your treatment as your condition changes.

If you are on insulin, it's important to check your blood sugar levels on a regular basis. You can use a finger prick blood glucose test to do this. The results will help your medical team decide the best treatment.

Diabetes is treatable and there is a lot of support available.

If you are diagnosed with diabetes after your transplant, you will be referred to your GP or a local diabetes team. They will:

- help you manage the condition on a day-to-day basis
- advise you about important regular screening that will help to protect your kidney and overall health

Find support and advice

You can also find support and advice from these sources:

- [Diabetes UK](#) is the leading charity for people with diabetes in the UK. It has useful information. It explains, for example, what diabetes is, different types of diabetes, foods to eat and self-management. There are videos and much, much more.

Telephone helpline: 0345 123 2399

Email: Helpline@diabetes.org.uk

- [Know Diabetes](#) is for people living with diabetes in Northwest London. It has lots of information about prevention of diabetes, food choices, local support groups and education courses.

You can also sign up for a free NHS Know Diabetes account

- [NHS diabetes](#)
- [Kidney Care UK diabetes page](#)
- [Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust Renal Diabetes team](#)
Email: imperial.renaldiabetes@nhs.net

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service, and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

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