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Choosing a caregiver to help you on your kidney transplant journey

What is a caregiver and what are their responsibilities?

Your caregiver is a critical part of your transplant journey. Transplant is a long process that can be emotionally and physically tiring. Your caregiver can help by taking care of things that you may not be able to do yourself so that you can focus on your health and recovery.

Here are some of things your caregiver needs to be ready to do:

- Provide emotional support and encouragement.
- Help you understand important info given to you by your transplant team.
- Take you to your medical visits and stay with you at the hospital.
- Drive you to and attend all your doctor's appointments for at least 1-month post-transplant.
- Help you with household chores.
- Help you track and take your meds.
- Check and write down your blood pressure, blood sugar, temperature, and pee output multiple times a day, every day during the first few weeks post-transplant.
- Help with bathing and meals after surgery.

TIP Your caregiver must be available for 24-hour care after your transplant until you are fully able to care for yourself. This means intensive caretaking for 3-4 weeks.

How do I choose a caregiver?

You will need to identify a caregiver before your first evaluation. Your caregiver should be someone who is trustworthy, attentive, and organized. Many patients choose a family member or close friend to be their caregiver. In addition to being able to support you, your caregiver must be able to take care of themselves as well. Before taking on this role, your caregiver should plan with their workplace to take time off to care for you after surgery. They will also want to find out about their options regarding:

- Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
- Sick time
- Vacation time
- Paid Family Leave

Talk with the social work team about any questions you or your caregiver have about those options.

It is also very important that you choose a caregiver who can drive you to all your medical appointments. UCLA Health does not recommend using public transportation services during your transplant process. If your caregiver is unavailable to take you to your medical appointments, try to arrange for another trusted person to drive you.

Unfortunately, UCLA Health does not have a public transportation service of its own for patients.

How will my caregiver help me before the surgery?

Your caregiver must go to your first evaluation with you. Throughout this phase, your caregiver will help you by attending and learning with you, asking questions, and learning about what it means to be a caregiver. Some things the transplant team will teach your caregiver are:

- How to take care of you before and after surgery.
- Handling emergencies and who to ask for help.
- How to help you keep track of your new health regimen.

After you have completed the evaluation process and are put on the waitlist, your caregiver's main role will be to remind you to stay healthy and active during the wait and prepare with you for your surgery once the date is near.

What do I do if my caregiver changes?

Sometimes life events occur and you may need to change who your caregiver is. If your caregiver is no longer able or willing to take on the role, or if you have decided to make a change in who your caregiver will be, you must contact your transplant team immediately. Your transplant team will do their best to support you as you look for a new caregiver. Once you've selected your new caregiver, they may need to meet with your care team to learn about the transplant process and their responsibilities as they take on the role.

What will my caregiver need to do to make sure they are able to take care of me?

Your caregiver must attend transplant evaluation with you. Your caregiver will need to attend mandatory transplant teaching sessions before your transplant and during the 4-7 days immediately following transplant while you are in the hospital. These sessions will help them learn how to provide care, how to manage your meds, and discharge education.

