

**Release date** August 12, 2005

---

**Authors**

Bryan Becker  
Thomas Pearson  
Hamid Rabb

**Contributing Committees**

AST Kidney Pancreas Committee  
AST Patient Care and Education Committee

# *FACTS ABOUT KIDNEY TRANSPLANTATION*

## Getting an Expanded-Donor Kidney



*The American Society of Transplantation*

*15000 Commerce Parkway  
Suite C  
Mount Laurel, NJ 08054  
Phone: 856-439-9986  
Fax: 856-439-9982  
E-mail: [ast@abint.com](mailto:ast@abint.com)*

# ***GETTING AN EXPANDED-DONOR KIDNEY***

A kidney transplant is one of the best ways to treat kidney failure. It has a very high rate of success. Yet many people cannot get a transplant because there are more than 60,000 people now waiting for kidneys. Doctors and transplant teams have been looking for ways to give kidney transplants to patients who want them. One fairly new source of kidneys is from what is called an “expanded donor.”

## ***1. WHAT IS AN EXPANDED-DONOR KIDNEY?***

This is a kidney from an older donor or one who has less-than-normal kidney function. The United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) defines an expanded donor this way:

- Any donor of age 60 or older
- Any donor between the ages of 50 and 59 with two of the following conditions:
  - Death due to a stroke
  - History of high blood pressure
  - Signs of less-than-normal kidney function before death

One example of this kind of donor is a 60-year-old man in perfect health who dies in a car accident. Although he was in perfect health, his kidneys on the whole will not last as long as a kidney from a younger donor. Still, this kidney may be preferable to dialysis.

A second type of donor is a 55-year-old woman with high blood pressure and mild kidney disease. Her kidney is less likely to do well over time than that of a younger donor. However, it may offer a longer life than dialysis.

As you know, kidneys from younger donors may have problems, too. They can fail sooner than expected.

## ***2. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A KIDNEY FROM AN EXPANDED DONOR AND ONE FROM A STANDARD DONOR?***

Kidney transplants from donors who have died work very well. Four out of five patients who get one of these transplants stay off dialysis for 3 years. But there is no sure way to know which patients will have working kidneys after 3 years and which patients will not.

A kidney from an expanded donor does have a higher chance of not working as well or as long as a standard kidney. Still, they may offer a longer life than dialysis.

## ***3. WHY WOULD I THINK ABOUT ACCEPTING AN EXPANDED-DONOR KIDNEY?***

In short, it will increase your chance of having a transplant. These are the facts:

- There is a national shortage of kidneys that can be used for transplant.
- There are 60,000 patients now on the kidney waiting list. This number grows each year.
- Waiting times get longer all the time.
- Most parts of the country have waiting times of more than 4 years.
- Thousands of patients will die waiting for a kidney this year.

If you go on both the expanded-donor *and the standard-donor kidney waiting list*, your chance of a transplant is greater.

Finally, a transplant from an expanded donor is better than none at all. This was shown in a study done by the National Kidney Program. Patients who had expanded-donor kidneys lived 3 to 10 years longer than those on dialysis who never had a transplant (SRTR annual data report).

#### **4. WHAT ARE THE RISKS WITH AN EXPANDED-DONOR KIDNEY?**

Most people who have expanded-donor kidneys will live longer than those on dialysis. **But** this is not true for every person. Some people will do worse because of the following:

- The transplant kidney itself
- The risks of surgery
- The risks and side effects of transplant medicines

#### **5. HOW DO I DECIDE ABOUT GETTING AN EXPANDED-DONOR KIDNEY?**

The right choice for you depends on the state of your health. You need to discuss this with your medical team and all your doctors. The best answer for you may change if the state of your health changes. You should go over your decision with your doctors from time to time.

In general, if you have not yet started dialysis or are doing well with it, you may wish to wait for a kidney from a standard donor. On the other hand, you may feel that you cannot wait. In this case, you might want to think about an expanded-donor kidney.

Questions you should ask yourself:

- Are you started on dialysis?
- Are you having any problems with your dialysis access?
- How are you doing in your dialysis?
- How long have you been on the transplant waiting list?
- What is your overall life expectancy?

#### **6. ARE THESE EXPANDED-DONOR KIDNEYS BEING OFFERED TO EVERYONE ON THE KIDNEY TRANSPLANT WAITING LIST?**

No. As of September 4, 2002, UNOS has a new policy.

Standard kidneys are the only ones being offered to people on the standard-kidney transplant waiting list. ***All patients who agree to an expanded-donor kidney are also on the active standard-kidney transplant list. Being on the expanded-kidney donor list does not reduce your chance of receiving a standard-donor kidney in any way.***

Expanded-donor kidneys are only for those on the expanded-donor waiting list. Persons on this waiting list must decide ***ahead of time*** if they want this option. One cannot join the waiting list at the last minute.

#### **7. IF I SAY THAT I WOULD BE WILLING TO CONSIDER AN EXPANDED-DONOR KIDNEY, WHICH WAITING LIST WILL I BE ON?**

Both.

You will be listed on the standard waiting list ***and*** on the expanded-donor waiting list.

***8. IF I AGREE TO BE ON THE EXPANDED-DONOR WAITING LIST, DOES IT MEAN THAT I MIGHT NOT GET A STANDARD KIDNEY?***

No.

Being on the expanded-donor kidney list does *not* hurt your chances of being offered a standard kidney. You will still be in line for a standard kidney by UNOS rules. Every time a standard kidney is found anywhere in the United States, you will have a chance to receive it. You will be offered the kidney if you are found to be the best recipient for that kidney.

***9. IF I AGREE TO BE ON THE EXPANDED-DONOR WAITING LIST, WILL IT IMPROVE MY CHANCES OF GETTING A STANDARD KIDNEY?***

No.

Being on the expanded-donor kidney list does *not* move you ahead in the waiting list for a standard kidney. It does not give you any “bonus points.”

***10. IF I DO NOT AGREE TO BE ON THE EXPANDED-DONOR WAITING LIST, WILL IT HURT MY CHANCE OF GETTING A STANDARD KIDNEY?***

No.

There is no penalty if you choose not to be on the expanded-donor waiting list. You will not lose any of your benefits. Your place on the standard waiting list for a standard kidney is in no way harmed if you do not want to be on the expanded-donor kidney waiting list.

***11. IF I AM LISTED ON THE EXPANDED-DONOR WAITING LIST, DO I HAVE TO ACCEPT AN EXPANDED-DONOR KIDNEY IF OFFERED?***

No.

It will always be your choice right up to the time of surgery. When an expanded-donor kidney is offered to you, you will discuss with your transplant team whether it is best for you to accept the kidney at that time. You may wish to turn it down if you are doing well. Your decision does not affect your chance of being offered a kidney later.

***12. CAN I CHANGE MY MIND AND REMOVE MY NAME FROM THE EXPANDED-DONOR WAITING LIST ONCE I AM ON IT?***

Yes.

You may be removed or added to the expanded-donor waiting list at any time. If you take your name off the expanded-donor waiting list, you will only be contacted for standard kidneys.