

Is There a New Kidney in Your Dog's Future?

Answer these questions to see if your dog can qualify for a kidney transplant.

Has your veterinarian diagnosed your dog to be in the early stages of terminal kidney failure? Are its blood urea and creatinine (measures of kidney function) abnormal and not improving with aggressive medical treatment? Is it relatively young: less than 8 years old if a large breed or less than 10 if a small breed? Do its own kidneys have a life expectancy of less than a week? Does it still have an appetite and little, if any, weight loss? Has it been free of infection - including skin, ear and bladder infections - for at least six months? Is it free of underlying diseases that would worsen with strong immune-system suppression, such as cancer or pancreatitis? Is its kidney failure the result of age or genetic defect and not the result of poisons, such as antifreeze? Does it have an easygoing personality, and is it easy to handle and able to keep a happy attitude despite surgery, pills and injections? Is it able to enjoy life confined to a house and without the company of other dogs?

If you've answered yes to the 10 questions, your dog fits the profile for a kidney transplant. But transplantation is a team effort, and the postoperative treatments are intensive, expensive and can be time consuming. Yes answers to the questions below suggest you could manage the sacrifices transplantation demands. Can you give medication at least twice daily without fail for many years? Can you afford to spend \$10,000 the first year without borrowing? Can you forego vacations during at least the first year to care for your dog? Will you be able to see your veterinarian frequently - sometimes daily - for scheduled and nonscheduled visits, both day and night? Can you avoid contact with other dogs? You'll need to groom at home, avoid kennels and make special provisions at the veterinary office to avoid minor infections, such as kennel cough, that can threaten immunosuppressed animals. Can you handle the roller coaster of emotions as you live each day both in high hopes of long-term survival and lingering fears of losing your companion?

If you and your dog fit the profile, ask your veterinarian to refer you to a surgical center for evaluation. For information about programs with the highest success rates, call the Ontario Veterinary College at (519) 823-8830 or the University of California, Davis, College of Veterinary Medicine at (530) 752-1393.