

# Having a Kidney Transplant During COVID-19

By Jewel Edwards-Ashman

I started the year 2020 anticipating that I'd enter kidney failure and have to undergo my second kidney transplant. But I didn't expect to start doing home dialysis and eventually have transplant surgery in the middle of a pandemic.

Transplant surgery in ordinary circumstances comes with a high level of stress and anxiety. Having a kidney transplant during a public health crisis only exacerbated those feelings for me. To reduce my stress and manage my emotions, here are three things I did:

**I prioritized self-care.** Most Americans, even those who aren't living with chronic illness, have been experiencing significant stress this year. News and events surrounding the pandemic, the election and racism have pushed our mental health to its limit. Adding "have a kidney transplant" to that list only increased my stress levels. To help myself relax, I turned my manual peritoneal dialysis sessions leading up to my transplant into "self-care sessions." During exchanges, I listened to a guided meditation, read a book or video-called members of my family. All these activities helped me calm my mind and injected moments of joy into my day.

**I kept in touch with family and friends.** Most people are physical distancing, and hospitals are following protocols to protect patients from contracting COVID-19. Because of this I've had to attend some doctor's appointments by myself, and I've awakened in the recovery room after several post-transplant procedures without a

familiar face to greet me. Still, it's important to keep your support system of family and friends involved in your treatment for kidney disease. Leading up to my second transplant, my family and I held meetings via video call where I gave updates on the evaluation process and the surgery. On the day of the transplant, a few hours after waking up, I texted everyone to let them know that the surgery went well and that I was OK.

**I talked with a therapist about how I'm feeling.** For the past few years, I've been seeing a licensed psychologist to help me cope with the mental and emotional issues that accompany living with a chronic illness. My therapist has also helped me come to terms with the fact that I had to live through kidney failure a second time. Whether you've just been diagnosed with kidney disease or have been living with it several years, it's never too late to seek professional help. The social worker at your dialysis center can connect you with resources. You can also visit the American Psychological Association website at [APA.org](https://www.apa.org) to find a licensed psychologist in your area.



Additional resources on stress and coping are available below and at [APA.org](https://www.apa.org):

- Stress Facts and Tips <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress>
- Healthy Ways to Handle Life's Stressors <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress-tips>
- How to Choose a Therapist <https://www.apa.org/topics/choose-therapist>

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