

WHAT IS RENAL FAILURE?

Renal failure is kidney failure. The word renal comes from the Latin word for kidney. The simple truth is that kidney failure is when the kidneys stop functioning properly. The less simple question is, "What does that mean to a person like Stephen and a family like the Smiths?"

Cells throughout your body take in food and oxygen to use for energy.

The process results in waste that is dumped into the bloodstream. The kidney's job is to take the waste and excrete it through urine. (Your body also gets rid of waste through sweating, sneezing, coughing, and feces.)

Blood heads to the kidneys from the heart, where the blood is filtered.

Not only are waste products removed, but electrolytes are balanced in the blood and the body fluids are monitored. So kidneys control levels of electrolytes like sodium or potassium. They also keep normal people from retaining water.

When the kidneys fail, there are many consequences! Toxic waste builds up in the blood, making it difficult to think clearly or to stay healthy. The electrolyte balance is thrown off which can cause muscle weakness, confusion, and personality changes.

A person cannot live without at least one functioning kidney. The toxic waste build-up alone would kill him. When someone is in renal failure, they must have their blood filtered by an outside source in a process known as dialysis. For a family like Steve Smith's, it means that three times a week he must go spend an afternoon in the hospital and have his blood filtered for him until he receives a new kidney.