

The Decision to Donate a Kidney

What you should know



MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL

TRANSPLANT CENTER

Considering Kidney Donation

Donating one of your organs to someone else is a momentous decision. It doesn't matter whether they're a friend, a family member or a complete stranger; it's a significant and meaningful act that will change both of your lives.

The Donor Experience

As a potential donor, you will receive extensive information during your evaluation at Massachusetts General Hospital. You will have many opportunities to ask questions and talk about the donation process with highly experienced nurse coordinators, social workers and physicians.

What is Living Donation?

Living donation is when a living person donates an organ for transplantation to another person. Living donation usually involves one kidney.

Why Would Someone Want to Donate a Kidney?

Donors are amazingly generous people who are motivated to help for a variety of reasons. Some have had a personal experience with illness in a family member or friend that motivates them to donate. Some donors are familiar with kidney disease and aware of the difference a living kidney donation can make to the recipient. Some donors make this decision purely out of a willingness to do whatever they can to save the life of a loved one, a friend or a family member.

Sometimes donors are motivated by altruistic ideals or inspired by religious faith. While donors do not gain a medical or financial benefit from donation, the vast majority of them experience an emotional reward. When asked years after donating, most people report being very happy about their decision and say it was one of their proudest moments.

Live Kidney Donor Myths & Realities

Myth: Only a blood relative can donate a kidney.

Reality: You do not need to have any blood relationship to someone to donate a kidney to them.

Myth: My kidney will only work for someone with my blood group.

Reality: Thanks to paired kidney exchange and ABO (blood group) incompatible donation, you can donate your kidney directly to your intended recipient or to a paired recipient. This means that your kidney will go to a recipient with a match, while the person you chose to donate your kidney to will receive a kidney from another matched donor—usually on the same day. In addition, anyone can receive a kidney from a donor with blood group O (also known as the “universal donor”).

Myth: Potential donors need to live in New England, or near Massachusetts General Hospital.

Reality: While evaluations can take a bit more time with an out-of-town donor, Massachusetts General Hospital patients have received kidneys from donors who hail from dozens of states and from as far away as India.

Myth: You only need one kidney, so anyone can be a kidney donor.

Reality: Living donors must have excellent medical and mental health to undergo donation surgery and life with only one kidney. Only about 20-25% of patients who are evaluated to donate a kidney at Massachusetts General Hospital qualify.

Who Can be a Living Donor?

A donor may be a family member, spouse, friend, co-worker, acquaintance, neighbor or even someone your recipient may not know. Donors have excellent general medical and mental health and they volunteer to donate, free of coercion, pressure or expectation of financial gain.

What if I Have a Health Condition?

In order to qualify as a living donor, you must be physically fit, in good mental and physical health. You cannot have diabetes, cancer, kidney disease or heart disease. People considered for living donation are usually between 18-75 years old. You will have extensive testing to make sure you can live a perfectly healthy life with only one kidney.

Do I Have to Donate to a Specific Person?

No. If you qualify to be a donor, you can give a kidney to a complete stranger who you want to help.

What Are the Risks Associated with Living Kidney Donation?

Donating a kidney and living with one kidney does not affect your life expectancy or quality of life. However, there is a slightly increased risk of high blood pressure, kidney failure and developing disease in your other kidney. The risk of dying from any surgical complication is very small. You will receive extensive education about all the risks of donation as part of your evaluation.

What Should I Expect?

- Complete a health screening form
- Two half-day, or one full day evaluations with the transplant donor team
- Lab testing, as needed
- A 4-8 week wait before approval
- A half-day visit to the hospital a week before donation
- 2-3 days in the hospital
- 4-6 weeks off work (recovery time varies and can depend on your job role/requirements)

You can expect to return to all normal activity, including sports. It may take several months to reach your pre-surgery level of activity, particularly if you are in top physical condition.

Will it Cost Me Money?

Most medical costs associated with living donation are covered by the recipient's insurance. There may be some out-of-pocket expenses during your evaluation and donation process (like parking). Regulations prevent the hospital from reimbursing you for these expenses. However, kidney recipients are legally allowed to help pay for your reasonable travel, housing and/or lost wages.

First Steps

If you're considering kidney donation, the first step is to let your potential recipient know. Then the two of you can connect with the team at Massachusetts General Hospital Transplant Center to determine how to proceed.

To do this, or if you have any questions at all about kidney donation, please get in touch at **(877) 644-2860**. You can also contact **(617) 643-7193** to begin working with your own donor transplant team of clinicians. You can also initiate an evaluation by visiting www.massgeneral.org/living-donor-kidney.

You might find it helpful to talk to others who have been through the organ donation or transplant process. A transplant coordinator can connect you with people who have been through this process who can share their experiences.

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