



Kidney transplant: Information for donors

Kidney transplant can be a very effective treatment for many patients with kidney failure. A patient with kidney failure can receive a healthy kidney from a living person who donates one of his or her kidneys or from a person who has died. Live kidney donors can be immediate or extended family members, friends, or coworkers. In some cases, live donors are people who have decided to donate a kidney to anyone who might need one (this is called a “non-directed donor.”)

A personal decision

If you are considering donating a kidney, it’s important that you take some time to get as much information as you can about the benefits and risks. If you have internet access, www.bidmc.org/transplant and www.livingdonors.org are good sites to view. Any conversations you have with members of our staff about kidney donation will be held in confidence. Talking with our staff does not mean that you must proceed with donation. If you wish, our staff can also put you in touch with someone who has donated a kidney so that you can hear about the experience first-hand. The most important thing is to make sure you feel comfortable with your decision to be evaluated for donation. This decision affects your whole family, so we encourage you to discuss this with family as well.

Advantages of a living donor kidney transplant

- **Works immediately:** Compared to a kidney from a deceased donor, a live donor kidney works immediately almost all of the time.
- **Last longer:** On average, a living donor kidney can be expected to function well for an average of 12-18 years, compared to 8-13 years for a deceased donor transplant.
- **Convenience and timing:** The surgery can be scheduled at a time that is convenient for both the donor and the recipient. It eliminates the stressful period of waiting for a suitable deceased donor organ to become available, and can thus shorten the time the patient spends on dialysis.
- **Recovery from surgery:** Patients who receive a kidney from a living donor usually spend less time in the hospital for the transplant surgery than those who receive a deceased donor organ.
- **Transplant before dialysis:** If a living donor is available, it may be possible for the patient with kidney failure to undergo transplant before he or she ever needs dialysis. Patients who have this surgery – called “*preemptive transplant*” – have been shown to have longer lives and longer-lasting function of the transplanted kidney when compared to patients who had dialysis prior to transplant.

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Am I a suitable donor?

In determining who is eligible to donate, we consider the potential donor's health and kidney function. The body is able to function normally with just one healthy kidney. Anyone who is known to have any of the following is not suitable to be a kidney donor:

- diabetes
- poorly-controlled high blood pressure
- a history of multiple kidney stones
- HIV/AIDS
- severe obesity

If you are unsure if you are a suitable donor, please feel free to contact the donor coordinator at BIDMC at 617-632-9700.

Effects on the donor

Studies have shown that people who donate a kidney think of the experience as positive even though it offers them no direct medical benefits. The donor does not face an increased risk of kidney disease or other diseases related to the kidney, such as high blood pressure and diabetes. A donor does not have to follow a special diet or take special medicines once the recovery from donor surgery is complete.

Risks and complications of surgery

The risk of complications from kidney donation surgery is very low. Nationwide, the risk of death from donation is 3 in 10,000. The risk of wound infection or other minor complications is about 1%. This means 1 person in 100 has a complication. These complications can be treated easily and effectively.

Donor surgery

The donor surgery is performed laparoscopically under general anesthesia. In this procedure, a small tube connected to a camera is inserted through a small incision in the middle of the abdomen. Additional instruments to remove the kidney are inserted through two other small incisions. The kidney is removed through a slightly larger incision made in the abdomen near the end of the procedure.

Recovery

Most donors remain in the hospital for two days. There is some pain associated with the surgery, but this is usually well controlled with medication. For the first several weeks after kidney donation surgery, patients may feel tired and emotionally drained. They are advised to

rest frequently during this period and to gradually increase activities. Most donors use some pain medication by mouth for up to one – two weeks after surgery.

Next steps

If you think you might like to become a kidney donor, please call our transplant office at 617-632-9700. All results are kept confidential. The process generally proceeds as follows:

1. Interested people speak with the donor coordinator on the phone and answer a series of questions about medical history.
2. You will be asked to come in for an initial blood test. It takes one-two weeks to get the results back to the donor.
3. We will ask you to send us copies of routine health screening reports. This includes:
 - colonoscopy if you are over 50
 - PSA for men over 40
 - a current PAP smear for women
 - a current mammogram if you are a woman over 40
4. We'll schedule an appointment for you to come in to our office to meet a kidney specialist on our team and to undergo a complete physical exam. A psychologist or social worker will meet with you as well. We will ask everyone for the following tests; you might need additional tests, based on your own history:
 - chest x-ray
 - electrocardiogram (EKG)
 - multiple blood and urine tests (including a test for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS)
 - 24-hour urine collection
5. We'll order a CT scan ("CAT" scan) of your kidneys to make sure there are no abnormalities. A CAT scan involves getting an intravenous injection of dye. Rarely, people can have an allergic reaction to the dye. All your testing results will be reviewed by one of our kidney specialists and our multidisciplinary transplant team.
6. If all your testing is fine, we will make an appointment for you to see the transplant surgeon and an independent donor advocate.
7. The results from your tests and clinic appointments will be reviewed by the Donor Evaluation Team. You must be approved for donation by this committee before a surgery date can be scheduled. You will receive detailed information about how to prepare for the surgery once your date has been booked.



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