Living Donors
For a kidney/pancreas transplant

Are there different types of kidney donors?
There are 2 types of living kidney donors:

- A living related donor (LRD) is a blood relative who desires to donate to a family member.
- A living unrelated donor (LURD) could be a spouse, in-law, friend, co-worker, or anyone who desires to donate a kidney to a potential recipient.

What is the success rate for living kidney donation?
With an LRD or LURD transplant, the surgery can be planned in order to enhance the recipient’s well-being. The transplant can also be done much sooner than a kidney transplant from a deceased donor. This gives the recipient the chance to be the best health possible at the time of transplant.

The success rate for an LRD transplant is over 95% for the first year. On average, a kidney transplant for an LRD would be expected to function for 15 to 20 years.

A kidney from an LURD also has a success rate of 95% for the first year. This compares to a success rate of 90% after the first year for a patient who receives a kidney from a deceased donor.

“My sister was on dialysis. I was watching her get sicker. I was glad I could do something to help her get better.”

Who can I talk with about being a donor?
You may want to talk about living kidney donation with your family members, spouse or partner, friends, co-workers or other people who may be interested in donating. Providing family and friends with general information and a phone number to call for more information is an excellent place to start.
If talking about living kidney donation is uncomfortable for you, ask a close friend or family member to act as your advocate. It is also helpful to bring family and friends with you to your kidney transplant evaluation appointment so that we can explain living donor transplantation to them. Even if these people are not able to donate, they may be able to talk about living donation with others. You or someone who knows you needs to tell your story to people who might be able to donate.

Tips on Talking about Living Kidney Donation

- **Pick a place and time that feels right.** Your family member or friend needs to feel comfortable and have time to talk.

- **Speak from your heart and listen with your heart.** When you talk with your family members or friends about living kidney donation, take the time to listen to their feelings and concerns.

- **Be careful not to pressure others.** Donation is a major surgery. Other factors may also prevent your family members or friends from being a living kidney donor.

- **Give it time.** Don’t expect an answer right away. People will need information, time, and support to decide. They may need time to talk with their own family, employer, or others involved in their daily lives.

What else should I consider when talking with family and friends?

**Work**

Kidney donation is major surgery with a recovery time of 4 to 8 weeks. Sometimes a donor’s time off can be covered with sick leave and vacation pay or donated time from other employees. Employees in the U.S. may qualify for special leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

Federal government employees are allowed paid leave to be a living kidney donor. Some employers and state governments have also arranged for paid leave specifically for living donors. Encourage your family and friends to talk with their employer about time-off benefits that may be available to them.

**Family History**

Certain kidney diseases may be hereditary. A family member who wishes to donate a kidney should talk with their own doctor about this possible risk. The doctors in the living donor program can also talk with potential donors about this issue.

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**From a living unrelated donor:**

“I am already signed up as an organ donor, and being able to help someone when I am alive would be terrific.”

**From a potential transplant recipient:**

“I asked my grandmother to spread the word for me to the rest of the family. I knew my grandmother would not be the donor, but she was a great intermediary. It took the spotlight off of me.”

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**Pregnancy**

There is no evidence that pregnancy increases the risk of problems for the remaining kidney in a living kidney donor. Kidney donation should not interfere with a woman’s decision to become pregnant at a later date. But, there may be a higher risk of *preeclampsia* (high blood pressure and protein in the urine) and early delivery in women who have donated a kidney.

The general risk for preeclampsia is 2.5% (2.5 out of 100). For a woman who has donated a kidney, the risk is 4% to 5% (4 to 5 out of 100).

If the donor does become pregnant, she should tell her obstetrician that she has only 1 kidney. In general, no special care is needed.

**Religion**

Most religions view organ donation as a form of charity and love. All potential kidney donors receive a handout on the basic views of many religions about organ donation. Please contact your clergy for more information about the doctrine of your own faith community.

**Smoking and Drug Use Policy**

The transplant program recognizes that the use of tobacco, marijuana, and cocaine negatively impacts patient health. It increases the risks of surgery due to many factors, including lung infections and wound infection. Using these substances increases the risk of having future health problems such as kidney disease, heart disease, and cancer.

**The use of marijuana and illegal drugs is prohibited in our pre-transplant patients and living donors.**

Potential kidney donors must have stopped smoking for at least 60 days before the day of surgery. Also, we strongly recommend not smoking after kidney donation.

**Who can donate?**

Persons considering living kidney donation should:

- Be over the age of 21
- Be in good health
- Have a body mass index (BMI) no greater than 30
- Not have diabetes or high blood pressure
- Have normal kidney function
- Not smoke, or be willing to stop smoking
What if I have more than one donor?

You may have more than one family member or friend who would like to be evaluated at the same time. All individuals interested in being considered as a donor are encouraged to contact the Living Donor Program. Every potential living donor for you will be considered for evaluation by the transplant team. One donor is chosen to proceed through to the end of the evaluation.

Special care and attention are taken to ensure that your family and friends would not face unusual risk if they donate. This may mean the transplant team does not accept their offer of kidney donation to you.

Are there reasons interested family members or friends cannot donate?

Yes. Kidney donation is a major surgery. There is always risk involved when a person has major surgery. Only a person in optimal health, who does not have diabetes or high blood pressure and has normal functioning kidneys will be evaluated as a potential kidney donor.

Medical screening for a potential kidney donor usually takes about 3 to 6 months. This screening process is done to confirm that the potential donor is in good health. At several points during the medical screening process, the potential donor’s chart will be reviewed. The transplant team may decide not to accept your family member or friend’s offer of kidney donation based on medical screening tests.

What if my donor is healthy but cannot donate to me?

Your potential living donors may not be able to donate to you because of either a positive cross-match or an incompatible blood type. If this is true, you might want to learn more about UWMC’s Donor Exchange Program. This program matches recipient/donor pairs through the National Kidney Registry, which UWMC belongs to. The National Kidney Registry searches for a match among incompatible recipient/donor pairs until a match is found.

To learn more, visit the National Kidney Registry website at kidneyregistry.org.

What about organ donation from the general public?

We do evaluate individuals who are not related, either by blood or emotionally, to the person who needs a kidney. These are people who have a sincere desire to be a living kidney donor. They are called non-directed kidney donors.
UWMC has a non-directed donor program. Non-directed donors can donate either to someone on UWMC’s wait list or to someone on the National Kidney Registry’s waiting list.

Donors are generally matched to the person on the list with a compatible blood type who has been waiting the longest for a transplant.

**What is an independent donor advocate?**

To protect donors, every transplant program has an *independent donor advocate* (IDA). This is a person donors can talk with about their concerns. The IDA advises donors and helps guide them through the process of deciding if donating is in their best interest.

**What is the donor evaluation process?**

- The first step in the process is for interested family and friends to contact the Living Donor Program (LDP) at 206-598-3627.
- The IDA collects preliminary information from your potential living donors and explains the donor process to them.
- A donor information packet is sent to those who are interested. This packet contains a list of what medical information is required and forms to fill out. These forms must be completed and returned with all of the medical information requested before the evaluation can begin.
- The recipient must be medically and financially cleared for transplant before testing of the potential donor can begin.
- All medical evaluation testing for potential living donors must be approved by the LDP.
- The potential living donor may stop the evaluation at any time if they decide they do not want to donate.

**Donor Evaluation Steps Checklist**

- Potential donor contacts the IDA at 206-598-3627 for information.
- Potential donor completes medical questionnaire.
- Recipient cleared medically and financially for transplant.
- Donor evaluation begins.
Will I know how my donor is doing?

All potential living donor evaluations are confidential. Federal and state law requires us to keep all medical records confidential, so no information about your donor’s evaluation can be given to you or your nephrologist (kidney doctor) by the transplant team. This federal law is called the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Your donor may or may not choose to keep you updated about the evaluation process.

What do I need to know about payment for living donor evaluations?

- The costs for obtaining the initial medical information are not covered by the LDP. The required initial health history and physical exam should be covered by the potential living donor’s medical insurance policy. If your potential donor does not have medical insurance, they should call the LDP coordinator at 206-598-3627.

- Only the expenses for pre-approved tests and lab work ordered by the LDP can be submitted for payment.

- Payment of a potential living kidney donor’s medical expenses is limited to tests that are directly related to the required medical workup. If the testing uncovers medical problems that need further evaluation or treatment, the LDP will not cover those costs.

- The medical expenses for the evaluation testing, surgery, and hospital stay for the potential living kidney donor are the responsibility of the recipient’s insurance.

  Most recipients have insurance coverage that will pay these donor expenses. If you are not sure if your insurance will cover this, contact your insurance company or the UWMC Patient Revenue Manager.

What if my donor needs help with travel or housing costs?

If your potential donor cannot afford to travel to Seattle, or cannot drive between home and the medical center, some financial assistance may be available. The National Living Donor Assistance Center may be able to provide financial grants to pay for airline tickets, hotel stays, and gas so that your donor can come to the medical center to be evaluated and, if accepted, to be a donor.
This program will not pay for lost income if your donor has to take time off work without pay. Eligibility is based on both the donor’s family size and income and your family size and income. You can talk with your social worker about how to apply for this assistance.

**Is there a risk of death from donor surgery?**

The risk of death from donor surgery is very low. It occurs 3 times out of 10,000 for all donor operations. UWMC has had no donor deaths. We have done more than 500 living donor surgeries.

**What about after donation?**

Long-term follow-up of all kidney donors has shown no difference in their general health and length of life than that of the general population. After donation, the donor’s remaining kidney will grow to compensate for their removed kidney.

The LDP will contact your donor at 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years after their donor surgery. This is because UWMC will need to provide results of their kidney tests to UNOS for 2 years after their donation.

To learn more about living kidney donation, the Donor Exchange Program, or non-directed donation, call The Living Donor Program at 206-598-3627.
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Transplant Services:
206-598-8881