

Patient & Family Guide

2023

# Living Kidney Donation

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[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

# Living Kidney Donation

There are never enough kidneys donated to do transplants for all the people who need them. Some people wait years for the right kidney to be donated. If you are interested in becoming a living kidney donor, this pamphlet will answer some common questions.

## What are the benefits of a kidney transplant from a living donor?

- People who receive a kidney from a living donor generally have better outcomes with less complications than people who receive a kidney from a deceased donor (donor who died).
- A kidney from a living donor tends to last longer than one from a deceased donor.
- The waiting time for a kidney transplant from a living donor is much shorter than from a deceased donor. Transplant from a deceased donor can take months or years.

## **Who can donate a kidney?**

- A living donor may be:
  - › A family member (like a parent, sibling, adult child, or cousin)
  - › Someone who is close to you, but who is not related (like a spouse, friend, or coworker)
  - › Someone who does not know the recipient, but has heard of their need
  - › Someone who wishes to donate anonymously
- You can choose to meet the recipient if you both agree.
- It is important that you do not feel pressured by others to donate. At any time, you can choose not to go ahead with the donation.
- If you have any doubts about your decision to donate, do not start the process.

## **Deciding to donate**

- Deciding whether to donate is not easy. Each person must decide based on their own situation.
- The Living Kidney Donor Coordinator will talk with you about your options, answer any questions you may have, and support you in your decision.

## If I want to donate a kidney, how do I get started?

- The donor screening process is confidential. You can get information and be screened before making a commitment to donate.
- A possible donor must start the screening process themselves. This is done by calling the Living Kidney Donor Coordinator in your area.
- The Living Kidney Donor Coordinator will talk with you and ask you a few screening questions.
- If there are no concerns, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire with information about your medical and social history. This may also be done over the phone.
- The Living Kidney Donor Coordinator will review the questionnaire with you, explain the next steps, and answer any questions you may have.
- If there are no concerns, you will be referred for tests to make sure that it is safe for you to donate. Your Living Kidney Donor Coordinator will arrange for these tests. You will be able to have most of the tests in your community.

- **The tests will check your:**
  - › Overall physical health
  - › Kidney function (how well your kidney works)
  - › Kidney's blood vessels
  - › Cardiovascular system (heart)
  - › Motivation (reasons) for making this decision
- **Tests include:**
  - › Blood tests
  - › Urine tests
  - › Electrocardiogram (ECG/EKG)
  - › Chest X-ray
  - › Cancer screening
  - › Ultrasound of your kidneys
  - › CT scan
- Other tests may also be needed.
- Based on your test results, you may be found not suitable to donate at any step along the way.

## Evaluation

- If your test results are within a normal range and you decide you want to continue, your next step is to meet the social worker and the living kidney donor nephrologist (kidney specialist).
- The social worker will talk with you about your support system and your reasons for donating. They will explain the Donor Reimbursement Program. The Donor Reimbursement Program in each province can help donors with some of the costs related to screening and donation.

### The living kidney donor nephrologist will:

- › Go over all of your tests
- › Ask you about your medical history
- › Do a physical exam
- › Review the risks of donation with you
- The living donation team will decide if you can donate based on your tests, but the final decision is up to you.
- If you choose not to go ahead with the donation, the recipient team will only be told that you are not a suitable donor. Specific results of your evaluation are confidential.

# **Surgery**

## **What will happen before my surgery?**

- The donor, recipient, surgeons, and transplant coordinators will work together to choose a date for the surgery.
- Before the surgery, you will need to have more blood tests. You may also have an appointment with the donor surgeon.

## **What will happen during my surgery?**

- You will be admitted to the hospital the day before your scheduled surgery.
- Your surgery will be done early in the morning, usually between 7:30 and 9:30 a.m. The surgery will take 3 to 4 hours.
- Kidney removal surgery is called a nephrectomy.
- Your kidney will be taken out by laparoscopic surgery, if possible. In this surgery, the surgeon makes a few small incisions (cuts) in your stomach area to put in wand-like devices with video cameras (laparoscope) and small surgical tools.
- Your kidney is then removed through a small incision.

- If the surgery cannot be done with the laparoscope, an open nephrectomy will be done. In this surgery, your kidney is taken out through a small vertical (up and down) abdominal incision.
- Once your surgery is finished, the recipient's transplant surgery will start. Their surgery usually takes about 3 hours.

## What are the possible risks?

- The risks of donating a kidney are low. The chance of death with the donation surgery is very rare.
- Other important risks are related to the complications of surgery (like pneumonia, wound infection, or a blood clot in the leg). These complications happen in less than 2 out of 100 surgeries.
- There are also some long-term concerns. After donating a kidney, a person may be more likely to have high blood pressure and have some protein in their urine. There is also a small increased risk of kidney disease. The doctors will check to make sure that your risk of getting serious kidney disease is not higher than usual.
- **It is important that you have a clear understanding of these risks before agreeing to donate a kidney.**

# Recovery

## How long will it take to recover after my surgery?

- **After a laparoscopic nephrectomy**, you may leave the hospital in about 2 to 4 days.
  - › You may go back to work within a month (unless your job is physically demanding), or as told by your surgeon.
- **After an open nephrectomy**, you may need to stay in the hospital a little longer (1 to 2 extra days).
  - › Depending on your recovery, you will be able to go back to work within a month for office work and in about 8 to 12 weeks (2 to 3 months) for physically demanding jobs.

## For at least 6 weeks after surgery:

- › **Do not** lift anything heavy.
- › **Do not** do any hard exercise.
- Your surgeon will give you more information after your surgery.
- Your recovery may take longer than you expect, but most people are back to their regular activities after 12 weeks.

## Follow-up

About 6 weeks after you leave the hospital, you may need to see your surgeon for a follow-up appointment.

## Post Donation Program

- The Living Kidney Donor Coordinator will explain the post donation follow-up program, either before your surgery or within 2 weeks after your surgery.
- This program is voluntary, but it is recommended to support your ongoing health and well-being. Follow-up will include a yearly visit to your primary health care provider to:
  - › check your blood pressure.
  - › check your weight.
  - › check your urine.
  - › have blood tests.
  - › check your overall health.
- Your primary health care provider will send the results to the post donation coordinators.
- If there are any results that need follow-up, the post donation coordinators will ask your primary health care provider for more tests or ask you to see a kidney specialist in your area.

## Life after the donation

Most people live long, healthy lives with one healthy kidney. Most people who have donated a kidney feel mentally and physically well after surgery.

If you are interested in being assessed as a living kidney donor, please contact the Living Kidney Donor Coordinator in your area.

## Atlantic Canada Living Kidney Donation Programs

Location	Phone number
<b>Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island (PEI)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nova Scotia and PEI</li><li>• Cape Breton only</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› 902-473-5501</li><li>› 902-567-7299</li></ul>
<b>New Brunswick</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bathurst</li><li>• Moncton</li><li>• Saint John</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› 506-544-3567</li><li>› 506-869-2441</li><li>› 506-648-6968</li></ul>
<b>Newfoundland</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Corner Brook</li><li>• St. John's</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>› 709-784-6190</li><li>› 709-777-3570</li></ul>

# Resources

## The Kidney Foundation of Canada

› <https://kidney.ca>

## Multi-Organ Transplant Program of Atlantic Canada (MOTP)

› [www.motpatlantic.ca](http://www.motpatlantic.ca)

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:  
[www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources](http://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources)

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:  
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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