



Patient & Family Guide
2026

Living Kidney Donation

Aussi disponible en français :
FF85-2588



www.nshealth.ca

Living Kidney Donation

There are never enough donated kidneys 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 get a kidney from a living donor generally have better outcomes and 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 wait time for a kidney transplant from a living donor is much shorter than from a deceased donor. Waiting for a transplant from a deceased donor may take months or years.

Who can be a living kidney donor?

- A living kidney donor may be:
 - › A family member (like a parent, sibling, adult child, or cousin)
 - › Someone who is close to the recipient, 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 chooses to donate anonymously (without the recipient knowing who they are)
- You can choose to meet the recipient if you both agree.

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
 - › Support you in your decision
- **It is important that you do not feel pressured by others to donate.**

- If you have any doubts about your decision to donate, do not start the process.
- At any time, you can choose not to go ahead with the donation.

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

- The donor screening process is **confidential** (private). 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 (see page 11).
- The Living Kidney Donor Coordinator will talk with you and ask you some screening questions.
- If there are no concerns, they will ask you to fill out a form about your medical and social history. This may also be done over the phone.
- The Living Kidney Donor Coordinator will review the form 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. The Living Kidney Donor Coordinator will arrange for these tests. You will be able to have most of these tests in your community.
- **The tests will check:**
 - › Your overall physical health
 - › Your kidney function (how well your kidney works)
 - › The blood vessels in your kidneys
 - › Your cardiovascular system (heart)
 - › Your reasons for donating
- **The tests include:**
 - › Blood tests
 - › Urine (pee) tests
 - › Electrocardiogram (ECG or EKG)
 - › Chest X-ray
 - › Cancer screening
 - › Ultrasound of your kidneys
 - › CT scan
 - › Other tests, as needed
- Based on your test results, you may be found not suitable to donate.

Evaluation

- If your test results are within a normal range and you decide to continue, your next step will be 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. This is a Canada-wide program that can help donors with some of the costs related to screening and donation.
- **The living kidney donor nephrologist will:**
 - › Go over all of your test results
 - › Ask you about your medical history
 - › Do a physical exam
 - › Review the risks of donation with you
- The living kidney donation team will decide if you can donate based on your test results, 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 screening process are confidential.

Surgery

What will happen before my surgery?

- The recipient, surgeons, and transplant coordinators will work together with you to choose a date for your surgery.
- Before your 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**. A nephrectomy can be done in 2 ways:
 1. **Laparoscopic surgery:** 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 laparoscopes (very small telescopes) and small surgical tools.
 - › Then they remove your kidney through a small incision.

2. **Open nephrectomy:** If the surgery cannot be done with laparoscopes, you will have an open nephrectomy. In this surgery:
- › Your kidney is taken out through a small vertical (up and down) incision in your stomach area.
 - › When your surgery is done, the recipient's transplant surgery will start. This surgery usually takes about 3 hours.

What are the possible risks?

- The risks of donating a kidney are low. The chance of death is very low.
- Some serious, but rare, complications from surgery can happen. These include:
 - › Pneumonia (lung infection)
 - › Wound (incision area) infection
 - › 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, you may be more likely to have:
 - › High blood pressure
 - › Protein in your urine
 - › A slightly higher 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 understand these risks clearly 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 1 to 4 days.
 - › You may go back to work within 30 days (1 month) (unless your job is physically hard), or as told by your surgeon.
- **After an open nephrectomy:**
 - › You may need to stay in the hospital 1 to 2 days longer.
 - › Depending on your recovery, you may go back to work:
 - › Within 1 month for office work
 - › In about 8 to 12 weeks (2 to 3 months) if your job is physically demanding.

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.
- Most people are back to their usual activities after 12 weeks (3 months), but your recovery may take longer. Each person is different.

Follow-up

- About 6 weeks after you leave the hospital, you will have a follow-up appointment with your surgeon.

Post donation follow-up program

- The Living Kidney Donor Coordinator will explain the post donation follow-up program, either before your surgery or within 14 days (2 weeks) after your surgery.
- This program is voluntary (you can choose to do it or not), 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 (family doctor or nurse practitioner) to:
 - › Check your blood pressure
 - › Check your weight
 - › Have a urine test
 - › 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 nephrologist in your area.

Life after kidney 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 screened to be a living kidney donor, please contact the Living Kidney Donor Coordinator in your area.

Atlantic Canada Living Kidney Donation Programs

Location	Phone number
Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island (PEI) • Nova Scotia and PEI • Cape Breton only	› 902-473-5501 › 902-567-7299
New Brunswick • Bathurst • Moncton • Saint John	› 506-544-3567 › 506-869-2441 › 506-648-6968
Newfoundland • Corner Brook • St. John's	› 709-784-2978 › 709-777-3601

Resources

Living Organ Donation

- Canadian Blood Services
 - › www.blood.ca/en/organs-tissues/living-donation

Scan the QR code below on your device (open the camera on your device, point the camera at the code, and tap the banner or border that appears)



Multi-Organ Transplant Program of Atlantic Canada (MOTP)

- › www.motpatlantic.ca

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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

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

Prepared by: MOTP of Atlantic Canada Living Kidney
Donor Program

Designed and Managed by: Library Services

WQ85-2333 © September 2026 Nova Scotia Health Authority
To be reviewed September 2029 or sooner, if needed.

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<https://library.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources>