



Mount Baker
Foundation



WHAT TO EXPECT

Becoming a Living Kidney Donor

mtbakerfoundation.org

THE GIFT OF AN ORGAN IS TRULY A GIFT OF LIFE.

Giving a kidney to another individual can greatly improve their quality of life, by eliminating the need for dialysis and extending their life. Kidneys transplanted from living donors last longer than kidneys that are transplanted from deceased donors, and transplant recipients live twice as long as those who stay on dialysis.

WHY LIVING DONORS ARE SO IMPORTANT

A kidney from a living donor generally starts working right away, while a kidney from a deceased donor may take time to function adequately and the recipient may require dialysis for a period of time. About one-third of all kidney transplants are performed with the gift of a kidney from a living donor.

There are about 93,000 people on the waiting list for a kidney. And, every 10 minutes, another person is added to the list. The average wait time will vary between four months to more than six years. Some people never get a matching kidney from the list. Beyond the risks, it's important to remember that living kidney donors share a strong sense of purpose and enhanced quality of life as they understand the gift they have given.

Types of Living Donations

01. Paired Exchange

Your gift of a kidney may be directed to a family member or friend if you are a match or may be “swapped” if you are not a match for that person. This is called a “paired exchange,” where another donor who is a match for your patient will provide their kidney, while your kidney goes to someone who is a match.

02. Altruistic Donation

You also might be simply giving the gift of your kidney to an individual you do not know. This is also called a “non-directed donation” or “benevolent donation.”

How do I know if I can be a donor?

Generally, you must be at least 18 years of age, and in good mental and physical health with normal kidney function. Medical conditions that could prevent you from being a donor include uncontrolled high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, HIV, hepatitis, or acute infections. Also, if you have a serious mental health condition that requires treatment this may prevent you from being a donor.

Looking for a mentor?

support@mtbakerfoundation.org

STEP 1: BECOMING A DONOR

To become a donor, you will go through many of the same tests that a transplant patient goes through to determine eligibility (see our “Journey to Transplant” brochure). If you haven’t seen this brochure yet, please contact us at support@mtbakerfoundation.org or maria@mtbakerfoundation.org and we can send you one!

STEP 2: ASSESSING THE MEDICAL RISKS

While there are medical risks associated with kidney donation as with other major surgeries, complications are rare. The living kidney donor is the highest priority in this situation and can change their mind at any moment up until the surgery. The surgical experience itself may result in pain, infection (such as pneumonia or wound infection), blood clot, reaction to anesthesia, hernia, intestinal obstruction, or testicular swelling and discomfort in male donors.

Complications for US Living Kidney Donors

- Complications from surgery requiring intervention – 2.5% (0.3% for complications related to blood vessels)
- Need for blood transfusion – 0.4%
- Hospital readmission in the first six weeks after donation 2.2%
- Need for another operation in the first 6 weeks after donation – 0.5%
- Death (from all causes) – 0.07%
- Death directly attributable to the donation – 0.006%

Source: Weill-Cornell Medicine

Other risks

As a potential donor, you may worry about the recipient or feel guilty about any potential health issues they experience. You might be worried about the risks or complications for yourself, or the possibility of your remaining kidney failing. You will have to carefully consider your feelings about living kidney donation and come to terms with all possible outcomes (i.e., your own health, the health of the recipient, and the mental well-being of yourself, the recipient, and your loved ones.)

You must consider why you want to be a living donor because you cannot control the physical and emotional outcomes of the individuals involved. Each living donor is unique, and must weigh the risks and benefits for themselves, acknowledging that they are giving a gift to help save a life with no expectations for anything in return. The transplant team will be very helpful in answering your questions and coping with any concerns that arise.

For additional support

support@mtbakerfoundation.org

STEP 3: PLANNING AHEAD

You will need to plan ahead for the surgery – and this is major surgery – with time off work, childcare or elder care covered, additional expenses, insurance, testing, etc.

Accommodations

After surgery, the donor may stay in the hospital for a week, with recovery continuing at home or somewhere near the transplant center for a period of time. You should also plan to have someone to be with you following the surgery. Many people don't realize, however, that kidney donation is usually accomplished now via laparoscopic surgery, which minimized recovery time. The typical hospital stay is 2 days.

Generally, travel and hotel stay expenses are not covered by insurance. In some cases, you may receive paid leave from work through sick leave, state disability, or the Family Medical Leave Act – but you should verify this in advance.

Financial Aspects

01. Health Insurance

Kidney donors are required to have their own health insurance in case any medical issues or diagnoses arise during your evaluation to be a donor.

02. Testing and Care

The kidney recipient's Medicare or private health plan generally covers the testing necessary to see if you are a matching donor, as well as the surgery and hospitalization needed for the kidney donation. Generally, some post-operative care will also be covered, but not always.

03. Surgery

Here are some resources for covering the cost of the living donor's surgery:

- Medicare: <https://www.medicare.gov/coverage/organ-transplants>
- National Living Donor Assistance Center: Eligibility Guidelines for Assistance: <https://www.livingdonorassistance.org/How-to-Apply/Eligibility-Guidelines>
- Donor Care Network: <https://www.donorcarenetwork.org/support-and-protections/>

Legal Protections

Insurance plans cannot discriminate against them due to their choice to be a living donor. Long term care policies in Washington state may not reduce or limit coverage or apply other conditions due to a person's status of being a living donor. Family Medical Leave must be extended to living donors, and living donors are given priority on kidney waiting lists should their remaining kidney fail.

A legacy of caring for our community

mtbakerfoundation.org

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON LIVING KIDNEY DONATION

United Network of Organ Sharing: Living Donation:
unos.org/transplant/living-donation/

National Kidney Registry:
kidneyregistry.org

National Kidney Foundation:
kidney.org/transplantation/livingdonor

American Transplant Foundation Living Donation Guide:
americantransplantfoundation.org/about-transplant/living-donation/

OPTN Policies (Effective as of March 15 2021):
optn.transplant.hrsa.gov/media/1200/optn_policies.pdf
Living Donor Medical Evaluation Requirements (Policy 14.4)
Living Donors and psychosocial evaluation (Policy 14.1)
Living Donation Exclusion Criteria (Policy 14.4.D)

A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY AND GENERATIONAL TRANSFORMATION.

Catalyst. Generational. Transformation. We know these are big words. But we are willing to work towards them, learning day by day, month by month, and engaging with the heart of the communities throughout Whatcom County and with expert resources here in our community, across the state, nation and the world.

We actively seek experts in these areas, whether locally, across the state or nation. And we want to learn from what other communities are doing – even on a global basis. Please visit mtbakerfoundation.org/contact



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SHARE YOUR STORY WITH US

While we do not accept incoming grant applications, we want to hear from you about our areas of focus. We believe change happens when all stakeholders are engaged in understanding the issues and considering solutions.

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