Frequently asked Questions about Living Donor Kidney Donation.

Donating one's kidney to someone in need of a transplant is an important decision and a unique gift. Kidney transplantation enables a patient suffering from kidney disease to stop dialysis treatments and enjoy a life filled with more freedom, energy, and productivity.

Who Can be a Kidney Donor?

A living kidney donor is usually between 18 to 65 years of age and in good health. Donors over the age of 65 are considered on a case-by-case basis. Individuals interested in becoming a living donor at the University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences System can begin the process by calling our living donor team at (312) 996-6771.

What Might Rule out Someone as a Kidney Donor?

A history of heart disease, chronic lung or liver disease, kidney disease, hypertension, diabetes, cancer, or untreated psychiatric disease is usually a contraindication to donating. Smoking, obesity, and other health issues are considered on an individual basis. The voluntary donor will undergo an extensive evaluation process.

What Does Kidney Donor Surgery Involve?

The surgical procedure to remove a kidney from the donor is called a donor nephrectomy and takes approximately 2-3 hours. We routinely perform our living donor nephrectomies robotically, with very small incisions thereby facilitating a more comfortable and faster recovery. We are committed to facilitating ease of care for our patients throughout and after the procedure.

What are the Risks to Kidney Donors?

Once a living donor candidate has been completely evaluated and cleared, the chance of the donation affecting his/her lifespan or lifestyle is extremely low. With any surgery and anesthesia, however, there are risks. Nationally, the risk of having a life-threatening problem with donating a kidney is 1 in 3,000. The risk of minor complications such as a minor wound infection is about 2-4%. You will have a post-operative appointment with your surgeon 1-2 weeks after the surgery. Additional follow-up appointments will be scheduled at 6 months, 1 year, and 2 years after your donation. This will allow our team to monitor your kidney function. After your 2 year follow-up with the transplant center, we recommend annual check ups.

How Long will Recovery take?

Because the kidney donor operation is a major surgical procedure, donors find they have less energy and need about 4-6 weeks to return to their full pre-surgical activity level. For donors who worked
prior to surgery, disability coverage allows 6 weeks off for recovery; however, some donors return to work before this time.

**Who Pays for the Medical Costs?**

Living donors are financially responsible for their routine annual health maintenance testing (e.g., pap smear, mammogram, colonoscopy, etc.) or medical clearance that may be required for pre-existing conditions. However, all other testing required for the living donor evaluation as well as the hospitalization costs and physician services provided during the donation process are covered by recipient’s insurance.

**Are There any Expenses Not Covered?**

All non-medical expenses such as lost wages, child care, travel costs and daily living expenses that are incurred during the donation process are NOT covered. It is important for donors to consider the financial impact of these possible expenses. There are programs that may pay these expenses and our team will assist with your individual situation.

**What is the Long-Term outcome for Kidney Donors?**

Kidney donation has not been shown to increase adverse outcomes. In fact, the rate of end-stage renal disease (ESRD) was significantly lower in the group of patients who donated a kidney than the rate in the general population (180 versus 268 per million per year).

After donating one kidney (removing 50 percent of the functioning kidney mass), the remaining normal kidney compensates and the overall kidney function increases to approximately 70 percent of baseline at about two weeks and approximately 75 to 85 percent of baseline at long-term follow-up.

**Can a Female Donor have Children after Donating a Kidney?**

Women of childbearing age can have children after kidney donation because the donor surgery does not affect their reproductive organs.

**Donor Evaluation**

If you decide to become a living donor for kidney transplant, the initial evaluation involves a physician interview for screening to identify if there is anything in your medical history that will exclude you from donation. We will take a blood sample to find your blood group and to test the basic function of your kidneys. By taking blood pressure, height, and weight on your initial visit, we can get more information about your health status.
All potential donors meet with our physicians, a nurse coordinator, our pharmacist, financial advisor, donor advocate, social worker, and nutritionist. Your assigned nurse coordinator will help you through the entire process, from initial evaluation, to the surgical donation (if you are a candidate), and follow-up care after the surgery.

Blood tests are performed to confirm that you are a match with your intended recipient, screen your renal function, and rule out any organ dysfunctions. We will also screen for any transmissible diseases in your blood and perform cancer screening. All females over the age of 40 must have a recent mammogram and pap smear; for males over the age of 50, we will require PSA (prostate screening), and anyone over the age of 50 will need to have a colonoscopy at least every ten years. If you are medically fit and your blood test shows that you are not at risk of developing renal failure yourself, we will proceed to further testing, including a CT scan of your kidneys to evaluate how many arteries and veins are available in each kidney. This will allow the surgeons to plan for the surgery.

The Surgery

Your living donation surgery will be a minimally invasive procedure that will include an incision along the lower abdomen. Through use of the da Vinci® Surgical System, our expert surgical technique results in less pain, a smaller scar, and a shorter recovery time than traditional surgery. You should expect to spend two days in the hospital after the surgery.

Most donors will be able to return to work after 4 to 6 weeks depending on the physical activity level related to your job. Driving is usually restricted for the first two weeks after surgery, but your surgeon will make that determination based on your particular case.

Long-Term Care after Donation

Donors have a follow-up visit two weeks after the procedure to check renal function and wounds. Additional visits are scheduled for you at one month and 3 to 6 months after surgery. Our team will check your renal function through blood work, blood pressure, and urine analysis.

It is advisable to measure your blood pressure every 3 to 6 months and avoid taking any medication (such as ibuprofen) that can injure your remaining kidney. It’s also important to stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water during the day.

We are available to donors should any medical problems arise that are related to the living donation.