

The Living Donor Kidney Transplant Process



A step-by-step guide for
living kidney donors

Thinking of becoming a living kidney donor?

There are many reasons why a transplant from a living donor may be the best option for a patient. Transplant outcomes are generally better with kidneys from living donors than for kidneys from deceased donors. Outcomes are best for patients who receive a transplant before needing to start dialysis. With careful planning, a patient can avoid the need for dialysis and go straight to transplant from a living donor. Living donor transplants can be arranged to optimize timing for both the donor and the recipient.

While living donors are often related to the organ recipient, they don't have to be. Living donors can be siblings, parents, children, or relatives. A donor can also be a friend, relative through marriage, co-worker or a member of the recipient's community.

Donor Criteria

- Donors live normal healthy lives with one kidney.
- Donors must come forward voluntarily.
- Donors must not be under any pressure or be forced to donate.
- Donors must be in good physical and emotional health, and be able to give informed consent for the transplant procedure.
- In BC, donors must be at least 19 years of age.
- There is no strict upper age limit for donors.
- At any step in the process you can choose not to proceed.



Bryn, kidney recipient

The Referral Process



Step 1: Pre-Screen



Step 2: Laboratory and Diagnostic Studies



Step 3: Transplant Team Evaluation and Medical Imaging



Step 4: Surgery and Recovery



Getting Started

The living donor evaluation process is designed to make sure you are healthy and that it is safe for you to donate. It is important that you don't feel pressured by others to donate, and that you make a well-informed decision. At any point along the way, you may decide not to proceed.



STEP 1: PRE-SCREEN

As a prospective donor, you can begin the process by calling Pre-Transplant Services at Vancouver General Hospital or St. Paul's Hospital. You can find contact information for these centres on the back of this brochure or by visiting www.transplant.bc.ca.

You will need to complete a medical and social history questionnaire. If there are no immediate concerns, the nurse coordinator will arrange for a blood type and cross match test to check for compatibility between you and the recipient.

What if I am not a match for my recipient?

If you and your recipient do not directly match, a paired exchange may be considered. The Living Donor Paired Exchange Program enables incompatible donor and recipient pairs to proceed with the transplant by exchanging kidneys with another incompatible pair. Non-directed or anonymous donors can also be part of this program.

Is it better to be related to the donor?

No. The risk of rejection from a non-related living donor is low. The risk is equally low whether the donor is related or not.



STEP 2: LABORATORY AND DIAGNOSTIC STUDIES

You will need to do a number of tests to ensure it is safe for you to donate. Some tests may be done through your family doctor, and most can be done close to your home or work place, even if you live outside of the province.

Women need to schedule an appointment with their family doctor for a mammogram and Pap smear.



STEP 3: TRANSPLANT TEAM EVALUATION AND MEDICAL IMAGING

If the results of the laboratory and diagnostic testing are within normal range, and you decide you want to proceed, your next step is to meet the members of the transplant team in Vancouver. This visit usually happens over two days as there are many people to meet with and several medical imaging procedures that need to be performed. The transplant team includes a nurse coordinator, social worker, psychologist, transplant nephrologist and transplant surgeon. Medical imaging procedures include a nuclear renogram, ultrasound and CT angiogram.

Once all the evaluations and testing are completed, the transplant team will determine if you are a suitable donor. The results of your evaluation are confidential and are not shared with the recipient. Once you know the decision of the transplant team, you can decide if you would like to proceed.

If for any reason it is determined that you are not suitable as a living donor, the recipient will be told by the transplant team. Specific reasons for turning down a donor are not disclosed unless permission is granted.

What's the purpose of the two-day evaluation?

These appointments help us to make sure donation is safe for the donor and provide an opportunity to discuss the benefits and risks of donation. This will help you, as a potential donor, to make an informed decision.



Fatima, kidney recipient (left) and Salimah, kidney donor (right)



STEP 4: SURGERY AND RECOVERY

Choosing a surgical date usually requires discussions between the donor, recipient, surgeons, physicians, social workers and transplant coordinators.

As the surgery date draws near, both you and the recipient will need to update some of the matching tests and other blood tests.

Surgical procedures have advanced, and in most cases our transplant surgeons are able to use minimally invasive (laparoscopic) surgery.

What's the recovery time after surgery?

Donors usually spend 2-4 nights in the hospital and require between 4-12 weeks of additional recovery time. Donors from out of town should expect to stay in Vancouver for about a week after surgery.

Following surgery and throughout your life, you will require routine monitoring to make sure you stay healthy living with one kidney.

Who donates?

Donations most frequently are between people who know each other because they are relatives, friends or affiliated through religious or social groups.

What are the risks of donating a kidney?

Donating a kidney is major surgery. The risks include the possibility of infection, allergic reaction to general anesthesia, pneumonia, and the formation of a blood clot. The risk of dying from donating a kidney is 0.03%. The risk of serious complications is about 1-2%. Donors commonly have post-operative incision discomfort, constipation, abdominal discomfort, and nausea for the first week or two following surgery.

What if I decide I don't want to go through with the surgery?

It is important not to feel pressured by others to donate, and to make a well-informed decision. If at any time a potential donor decides not to proceed with donation, the donor assessment team will help notify all parties involved.

Financial Considerations

The medical costs associated with donor assessment and transplant surgery are covered if you are a Canadian resident. Donors from outside the country are also covered for assessment and surgery if it is done in Canada. Donors from outside the country who complete testing in their own country will have to pay upfront for the tests. The transplant centres may be able to reimburse some costs incurred, but this is not guaranteed.

The Odds Are Good

About 88% of kidney recipients who receive an organ from a non-related donor live five years or longer with their transplant.

You should investigate your health insurance plans before committing to the surgery. If you have banked sick time or short-term disability benefits through work you may qualify for sick benefits as described by the plan. If you have no sick benefits through work, but have made contributions to the unemployment insurance program, you should be eligible to receive up to 15 weeks of employment insurance benefits provided you meet the number of qualifying hours of work in the past year. In situations where you have no sick benefits through work or do not qualify for medical unemployment insurance, an application for loss of income subsidy benefits can be made through the Living Organ Donor Expense Reimbursement Program.

The Living Organ Donor Expense Reimbursement Program (LODERP)

The Living Organ Donor Expense Reimbursement Program may provide some financial assistance to living kidney donors to help cover the cost of travel, parking and accommodation during the team evaluation stage and the costs of travel, parking, accommodation, meals and loss of income at the time of surgery. The LODERP is administered through The Kidney Foundation of Canada, BC Branch (www.kidney.ca/BC/LODERP). Eligibility for LODERP will be discussed during your assessment.

The LODERP does not cover the costs of BC Ferries; however, the provincial Travel Assistance Program (TAPS) offers free travel on BC Ferries and discounted air travel when authorized by a doctor to those with a BC CareCard. These forms can be obtained from your transplant coordinator or your family doctor.

Need more information?

St. Paul's Hospital Living Donor Program

Unit 6A, 6th Floor, Providence Building
1081 Burrard Street

Vancouver, BC V6Z 1Y6

Phone: 604-806-9027

Fax: 604-806-9658

Toll Free: 1-877-922-9822

donornurse@providencehealth.bc.ca

recipientnurse@providencehealth.bc.ca

www.providencehealthcare.org

Vancouver General Hospital Living Donor Program

5th Floor, Gordon and Leslie Diamond Health Care Centre
2775 Laurel Street

Vancouver, BC V5Z 1M9

Phone: 604-875-5182

Fax: 604-875-5236

Toll Free: 1-855-875-5182

www.vch.ca

BC Children's Hospital Renal Transplant Program

K4-172

4480 Oak St.

Vancouver, BC V6H 3V4

Phone: 604-875-3613

Fax: 604-875-2943

Other Resources

BC Transplant

www.transplant.bc.ca

Living Organ Donor Expense Reimbursement Program (LODERP)

www.kidney.ca/BC/LODERP



Other brochures you may find useful:

The Kidney Transplant Process:
A step-by-step guide for kidney transplant recipients

Finding a Donor
Getting the Word Out: A step-by-step guide for reaching out to potential donors



**BC
TRANSPLANT**
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

Suite 350, West Tower
555 West 12th Ave.
Vancouver, BC
V5Z 3X7

Phone: 604-877-2240
Toll Free: 1-800-663-6189
Fax: 604-877-2111
Web: transplant.bc.ca

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