



National Kidney Foundation™

Fact Sheet

Living Donation

- In 2006, 6,434 Americans voluntarily underwent surgery to donate their kidneys and parts of other organs to relatives, friends and even strangers.
- According to the National Kidney Foundation (NKF), living organ donation has nearly tripled since 1990.
- A live organ can come from a family member, good friend, spouse, in-law or even from a stranger. Thanks to improved medications, a genetic link between the donor and recipient is no longer required to ensure a successful transplant.
- The organ most commonly given by a living donor is the kidney. People usually have two kidneys, and one is all that is needed to live a normal life. When the kidney is removed, the single normal kidney will increase in size to compensate for the loss of the donated kidney. Parts of other organs including the lung, liver and pancreas are now being transplanted from living donors.
- Living donation does not change life expectancy, and does not increase the risk of kidney failure. Pregnancy after donation is possible but is usually not recommended for at least six months after the surgery.
- To donate a kidney, you must be in good health and have normal kidney function. The prospective donor and recipient must have compatible blood types.
- Acceptable organ donors can range in age from newborn to 65 years or more. People who are 65 years of age or older may be acceptable donors, particularly of corneas, skin, bone and for total body donation.
- Tissue donation can enhance the lives of more than 50 people. It is now possible to donate a kidney and portion of the liver or lung while still alive.
- If you wish to donate to a stranger, it is important to educate yourself on donation and make sure you understand the risks and benefits of donation. If you decide to pursue donation, you will need to contact transplant centers in your area.
- Donors are never financially compensated. Under federal law, it is illegal to receive money or gifts in exchange for an organ donation. The cost of the living donor's evaluation, testing and surgery are generally paid for by the recipient's Medicare or private health insurance. However, donors may be eligible for sick leave and the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).
- A kidney can be removed in either of two ways, the traditional open surgery or the laparoscopic technique.