

## **The Non-Medical Risks of Living Donation**

### **Financial strain and potential impact on your job**

Living kidney donation will involve an absence from your job for, on average, four to six weeks. If your job includes doing heavy lifting, you may need to take more time off from work. In rare instances, donors require a longer recovery period. The living donor social worker will help you explore what impact this may have on your income and what options (if any) you may have for income continuation. If you will not be paid during your recovery, a state tax credit or deduction may be available. If finances will be tight during recovery, donors are encouraged to develop plans for this ahead of time, with help from the social worker.

It is important to find out ahead of time whether donating a kidney will jeopardize your job. Depending on your job, you may have Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) protections during your recovery period. If not, your employer may still choose to ‘support’ your decision to donate by authorizing your time off. However, it is also possible that donating a kidney will affect your employment status. The living donor social worker will help you explore options and potential impact.

### **Disruption in family obligations**

During surgical recovery, you will be limited from activities like driving and lifting. This means that if you typically care for someone else (a child or an elderly relative, for example) you will not be able to do this for several weeks after donation. It may be eight weeks before you can lift anything heavier than 20 pounds. The living donor social worker and your transplant coordinator will ask you about any dependents you have, and will encourage you to develop a support plan for your recovery.

### **Body image**

You will have scars on your abdomen after organ donation. The surgeon will be able to describe their appearance once the decision is made regarding which surgery technique is best for you. Some people describe changes in how they feel about their bodies with these scars. This is particularly true for people who have tattoo work across their bellies that may be affected by the scar.

## **Mood disruption**

Donation is an emotionally-loaded decision and you may experience a variety of feelings both before and after donation. There is a risk of experiencing depression, or low mood, after living donation. This can be considered an after-effect of anesthesia. Sometimes this occurs because donors are temporarily unable to do many of the activities that they typically enjoy, which are good for your mental health, such as exercising, working and active play with your children. Living donation may weigh you down emotionally, especially if you have a history of coping with depression or anxiety. Many emotions may be riding on the outcome of your own surgery as well as the recipient's surgery. It is common to experience a flood of feelings during recovery, particularly during a complex recovery. Some people have described relationships within their family, or with their recipient, changing. This may include a new sense of closeness, but may also include new challenges, particularly if you see the recipient having difficulty taking care of him/herself. The social worker and/or health psychologist will talk with you about these emotions, and other risks you might experience, during your donor evaluation.

## **Substance abuse relapse**

If addiction or substance abuse issues have been a problem for you in the past, surgical recovery can include a risk of relapse. If chronic pain is a problem for you, managing the pain medication during surgical recovery may be challenging.

## **Impact on future insurability**

Although the costs of living donation are covered by the recipient's insurance, donating an organ can still affect how you obtain insurance in the future. Kidney donation can be considered a pre-existing condition when you apply for either health or life insurance. This means that you might have higher premiums, and/or there might be a 'rider' placed on your coverage so that kidney donation-related needs are excluded, or that you might be denied insurance coverage.

If you have a group health insurance policy in place now, you have some portability protections, and your current insurance will probably be unaffected by donation. The living donor social worker can help you explore this possibility during your evaluation.

## **Relationship changes**

Some people describe relationship changes in their family following donation, sometimes in ways that surprise them. People who donate kidneys hoping to repair a past painful relationship may be disappointed that changes don't happen. Other people describe feeling disappointed in how the person who received the kidney (the 'transplant recipient') takes care of the new kidney. Yet others describe new feelings of closeness or intimacy after transplant. It can help to think about what your hopes are for the donation, and sort out ahead of time how much is within your control, and how you'll cope if someone doesn't respond in the way you hope.