

Skip the Wait: Seek a Living Donor

You can dramatically shorten the time you wait for a transplant by actively seeking a living donor. This checklist may help you prepare.

Educate yourself about your disease and treatment options

Before you discuss your disease with anyone, learn more about it so others can understand, too. It's okay to want to keep some things private, but you should also be prepared to answer questions such as: "How does your disease impact your life?", "Why can't you just go on dialysis?", "How will a kidney transplant improve your life?" and "What is better about receiving a living donor transplant?"

Understand living donation

The information in your binder and at uwhealth.org/livingdonor will help you prepare for conversations about your situation. Be ready to share basic information about various aspects of donation such as the donor testing process, surgery and recovery. We are here to discuss living donation with anyone considering this option. If you wish, we can connect you with one of our living donor mentors—people who have been through this experience and can help you with your questions.

Ask for more help

After you've studied your binder and our website; let us know if you have more questions. We have additional resources, or may partner you with a living donor recipient or living donor mentor who has faced the same issues. Keep your transplant coordinator's phone number with you at all times so you can connect interested potential donors directly with him/her.

Reflect on your relationships and everyone's personalities

Reflect on the situation from the potential donor's point of view to determine how they would best receive the information. Some issues to consider include: Are you/the potential donor talkative or quiet, private or open, one-on-one communicators or comfortable in a group of people, etc.

Consider all options

Anyone who is willing to consider donation can, and should, talk to your transplant coordinator. Consider all options including relatives, friends and people in your church, school, social clubs and community. Don't rule-out your children. Consider what you would want to do if your parent needed a transplant.

Get an ambassador

An ambassador can be a family member, friend or other caring person whom you trust and can turn to for support and assistance in sharing your need for a transplant with others. They should be well-educated on living donation, your communication preferences and your need for a transplant.

Draft a living donor information letter

Take a moment to read examples of letters others have used. Compose your own letter, or borrow from an example. Ask for their love and support even if they are unable to be your donor. Include our transplant center contact information, noted below. Even if you don't mail the letter and information, be ready to hand it out. Tell them not to answer that day, let them know you will not bring up the topic again and ensure them your future relationship is not based on their decision.

Consider broader messaging

You may decide to share your need for a kidney more publicly through a community bulletin, a holiday newsletter or via social media. Our staff has tips and tools to help you navigate these options, which can be labor-intensive and emotionally charged. We understand that your privacy is an issue, too.

Role play the living donor request conversation with your ambassador or transplant coordinator

Role play may help you feel more comfortable with the situation and could help sort out what you want to say, along with practicing answering potential questions potential donors may have.

Ask someone to be your living donor

Remember to give them time to process the information and to think carefully about their decision. They may wish to talk with a living donor mentor.

Remember that becoming a living donor is an immense decision

If people are uncomfortable with donation—or don't want to talk with you about it—this is not necessarily an indication of the depth of their feelings for you. Sometimes this decision takes time and sometimes people in your life want to offer support in other ways. Despite your best efforts, you may not find a living donor. Do not take this personally or as a sign of failure. Remember to take good care of your emotional and physical well-being. Our team is available to help you through this experience.

For more information about living donor kidney transplant, please go to: uwhealth.org/livingdonor or call (608) 263-1384.

Anyone interested in becoming a living donor may complete our online questionnaire at: uwhealth.org/CanIBeADonor