Living Donor Surgery – What To Expect
Now that you have made the decision to become a living donor and been evaluated by our transplant team, continue with daily routines that will keep you in good health.

- Eat healthy meals and snacks while waiting for your donation surgery. A balanced diet will help you manage your weight and keep your body functioning to the best of its ability before surgery.
- Stay active and exercise at least five days a week. Exercise before surgery helps to speed up recovery after surgery.
- Keep your transplant team's phone numbers with you at all times. Do not hesitate to contact any member of the transplant team with questions or concerns you might have while waiting to donate your kidney.
- To reduce the chance of getting sick while you are waiting to donate, we recommend you:
  - Do not share eating utensils and drinking glasses
  - Avoid people who are sick
  - Ask family and friends not to visit you when they are sick
  - Wash your hands with soap and water often or use an antibacterial cleaning gel and rub your hands together until they are dry
  - Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth where germs can easily enter the body

Please contact the transplant clinic with any significant health events such as surgery (including dental surgery), any hospitalizations, broken bones, open sores or wounds, any condition that requires you to take antibiotics, heart attack, stroke, or breathing problems. The transplant doctors will not move forward with surgery until both you and your intended recipient are determined to be in good health.

Tips Before Living Donation Surgery

Day Before Surgery Checklist

- Have your photo ID and money for parking
- Have a copy of legal medical documents, such as your Living Will and Medical Power of Attorney
- Pack a bag with loose-fitting clothes for when you go home
- Bring toothbrush, toothpaste, comb/brush and other personal grooming items
- Leave all valuables at home and remove jewelry and body piercings
- Have a light meal before you go to the hospital (after you check in, your diet will be limited to clear liquids)

Kathy, 55, of Miamisburg, Ohio had been diagnosed with focal segmental glomerulosclerosis—a disease where scar tissue forms in glomeruli, or filters, of the kidneys. “My kidneys were dying,” she explains. Her daughter Jill was the only one of Kathy’s three children who was a match for transplant.

Still, Kathy wasn’t convinced she should accept Jill’s kidney. “What if something would happen to her kidney, or if she wouldn’t be able to have children,” Kathy says. “But she told me, ‘Mom, you gave me life and now you need me. So I’m giving this gift to you.’” When Kathy finally came to terms with her condition, she called The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center to schedule the surgery.

Now Kathy can’t believe how much better she feels since her transplant. “When I look back, I see that I really didn’t feel well, even though I didn’t realize it,” she says. “I’m looking forward to seeing my kids and grandkids grow.”
All donation and transplant surgeries are done at Ohio State’s Wexner Medical Center by our transplant team. If our transplant team clears you as a donor and your recipient has been identified, the surgery will be scheduled several weeks later.

Week Before Surgery
About a week before the surgery date, you and your recipient will have blood drawn for a final tissue matching, as well as HIV and hepatitis testing.

Day Before Surgery – Day One in the Hospital
The day before your donation surgery you will be asked to check into the hospital, usually in the afternoon. When you arrive at the hospital, the nurses will show you to the room you will use during your stay. Once you are comfortable, the doctors and nurses will conduct a final examination. You can expect to have blood drawn and an IV placed in your arm. These final health checks help our transplant staff to know that you are in excellent health for donation. This is also a good time for you to ask any last minute questions, and to openly talk about any concerns you may have before surgery. As with most surgeries, you will not be allowed to eat or drink after midnight the night before surgery.

Surgery Day – Day Two in the Hospital
Most donor surgeries are scheduled for early the next morning. Your family should arrive at the hospital about an hour and a half before your scheduled surgery. During the time of your surgery and recovery, your family will be made comfortable in our waiting area where they will be given updates on your progress by hospital volunteers.

To prepare you for surgery, you will be taken to a pre-surgical area and given medicine to help you relax. When the transplant team is ready, you will be taken into surgery. Your recipient will follow you to surgery a short time later and be placed in an adjacent operating room. If you are able to have laparoscopic surgery, you can expect the procedure to last about two hours. Once the kidney you are donating is removed, it will be placed into the recipient’s body. You will then be taken to the surgical recovery room where you can expect to stay for about one to two hours.

After your time in the recovery room, you will be taken back to your room in the transplant unit where family and friends are welcome to visit. While in your room, you will be closely monitored by our transplant team to ensure you are recovering well, have limited nausea, are able to eat, use the bathroom and pass gas, and are free from infection. Ask us for help when you want to get out of bed, as the surgery and medicines you are given can make you feel less than steady on your feet.

Day After Surgery – Day Three in the Hospital
The day after surgery we will encourage you to get out of bed and walk with support around the hospital unit. You will also be asked to practice your coughing and deep breathing to protect your lungs. The road to recovery should be relatively quick, and you will be given pain medicine as needed to relieve any discomfort.

Second Day After Surgery – Day Four in the Hospital
Most donors are able to go home on the second day after surgery. You can expect to have some soreness and discomfort. However, you will not be able to leave the hospital until we are sure it is safe for you to continue your recovery in the comfort of your own home. In some cases, if you live more than two hours from the medical center you may be required to stay in the area for up to two weeks after your surgery.

It is important to remember that living kidney donation is a major surgery and you will need help while you recover at home. Please talk with your support person about your needs. If you have any questions, contact your living donor nurse coordinator at 614-293-6724 or 800-293-8965.

Home After Surgery
Every person reacts differently to surgery, and while some may be up and about the following week, it may take some a few additional weeks to return to normal routines. Expect to restart all normal activities within four weeks of surgery. Please do not lift objects over five to ten pounds for at least six weeks after surgery to protect your health and prevent wound problems.

During your recovery at home, we encourage you to contact our transplant team if you have questions or concerns about your progress. We have staff ready to answer your questions 24 hours a day.

After donation surgery, your continued good health is our main concern. It is required that you schedule and keep the follow-up appointments with Ohio State’s Transplant Center. Appointments will need to be scheduled for:

- Six weeks after surgery
- Six months after surgery
- One year after surgery
- Two years after surgery

After two years, we encourage you to visit your primary care physician for annual checkups.
Emotional Concerns

Both before and after surgery you may have many emotions about organ donation. You may be excited about giving the gift of life, while at the same time be worried about the future. There are no absolute guarantees about the success of the surgery. You and your recipient may face surgical complications. The transplanted organ may not work right away in your recipient. There is also the chance it will not work at all. It is normal to feel sad, anxious, angry or resentful after surgery. Organ donation may change the relationship you have with the recipient.

While there is most often joy in the celebration of life after living donation, we want you to be prepared before surgery. Talk about your feelings, ask questions and share your concerns with your living donor nurse coordinator, social worker and living donor advocate. We want living donation to be a positive experience and our healthcare team will work to prepare you for every step of the journey.

Husband and wife pilots Greg and Susan Williams have enjoyed flying together over the years. But following years of diabetes and a heart attack, Greg was too ill to fly or do much of anything else. “Doctors told me my kidneys were failing,” he says.

Greg, 71, went through several months of dialysis before he found a kidney donor—his co-pilot, Susan who says Ohio State’s transplant team walked them through every step to get ready for the transplant surgery in June 2010.

Greg says his experience was wonderful. “I think Ohio State has the best hospital I’ve ever been in, and let me tell you, I’ve been in a lot of them,” he says. “I’ve had 27 operations, so I’m an authority.”

Katie (left) received a kidney from her aunt Mary (right)
Living Donor Surgery – What to Expect

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For more information about living kidney donation, please contact a living donor nurse coordinator at 614-293-6724 or 800-293-8965.