



Live Kidney Donation: Medical Toolkit

CHAPTER • 10

Living kidney donors and mental health

If I donate a kidney, how might it affect my life afterwards?

Potential donors often wonder what their quality of life will be like, how they will feel, and how their life might change at work and home.

Studies show that on average, donors have positive feelings about donating. In the short-term and long term, they:

- Show little to no regret about donating
- Would make the same decision again to donate
- Feel deep fulfillment from donating
- Describe a good quality of life both before and after donating
- Describe the same or a better relationship with the recipient

However, some donors (about a quarter or 25%) do have difficulties. Here are common complaints after donating:

- Feeling very tired and weak (fatigue)
- Pain
- Worrying about their current and future health
- Relationship problems with their families or their recipients
- Body image problems – but this is less common now that surgery scars are smaller
- Mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety – some had these feelings before donating, while others didn't

Who might have mental health problems after donating?

Doctors don't know for sure who might have mental health problems after donating, but research shows that these groups may have a higher chance:

- Donors who felt unsure about donating
- Donors with longer recovery times
- Donors with mood problems after donating, such as anxiety or depression
- Donors with higher BMI (body mass index, which is a measure of body fat based on your height and weight)

Doctors don't know if your mental health after donating is linked to how well the recipient's health is after donation. Of course, donors feel sadness if the recipient has a hard time. But even in these cases, most donors are glad they did everything they could to help the recipient.

If I donate a kidney, how will my donor team support me?

Your donor team will:

- Talk with you ahead of time about your feelings about being a living donor
- Help you find people to support you during recovery
- Encourage you to stay connected with your therapist – and help you find one if you'd like
- Follow up with you to see how you're coping after donating



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References

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Note: This information is the opinion of the Living Donor Community of Practice (LDCOP) of the American Society of Transplantation. The LDCOP is a group of health care professionals and researchers who specialize in living kidney donation. The LDCOP's recommendations are meant to offer you helpful information, but you may find opinions from other groups or institutions that are helpful to you, too.