

Released | September 2002
Revised | December 2006
Reviewed | March 2012
Reviewed | May 2015
Reviewed | July 2018



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
TRANSPLANTATION

Who can be a Living Organ Donor? Questions and Answers about Live Organ Donation

Authors

Nasimul Ahsan, MD, FACP

Steven Alexander, MD

Roy D. Bloom, MD

Carl Cardella, MD

Francis Delmonico, MD

Michael Germain, MD

Marshall Hertz, MD

Martin Mai, MD

Thomas McCune, MD, FACP

George Pankey, MD

Manuel Pascual, MD

Mitchell Shiffman, MD

Robert Steiner, MD

Henkie Tan, MD, PhD, FACS

Stephen Tomlanovich, MD

John Vella, MD

Didier Mandelbrot, MD

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
TRANSPLANTATION

1120 Route 73, Suite 200
Mount Laurel, NJ 08054

Phone: 856-439-9986

E-mail: info@myAST.org

Website: myAST.org

The information presented and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Society.

Who Can Be a Living Organ Donor?

1. WHY ASK HEALTHY PEOPLE TO BE ORGAN DONORS?

More and more people today need organ transplants, but there are not enough good deceased donor organs available. An organ that comes from a person who recently died is called a deceased donor organ. Organs are only removed from a person after death if he or she volunteered to donate an organ at some point before death. Unfortunately, not enough people volunteer to be donors after death. That is why it is often necessary to consider a living organ donor. A healthy person can donate one kidney or a part of his or her liver, lung, pancreas, or intestine.

2. CAN ANYONE BE A LIVING ORGAN DONOR?

Sometimes a patient may ask a loved one or friend to donate an organ. There are some people who decide on their own to be a live organ donor to help an unknown person in need. Either way, this decision should be yours alone. No one should pressure you into donating an organ.

If you want to be an organ donor, you must be in good health. Depending on the decision of the transplant center, certain medical conditions may prevent you from donating your organ. Your future health is the greatest concern of the transplant team.

3. DOES IT HURT TO DONATE?

All surgery can cause some pain while you recover. How much pain you feel depends on the type of operation you have. Your transplant team will make sure you have the least pain and discomfort possible. Most organ donors believe the pain is worth it because they have helped someone live a longer, healthier life.

4. WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Before you donate an organ, the transplant team will evaluate risks for you. They will explain all the risks, including your risks of future health conditions that may be affected by your donation. They will also explain the chances of your donated organ helping the recipient and what alternatives there are if you decide not to donate. The transplant team will always be available to answer your questions.

5. CAN I GET PAID FOR DONATING AN ORGAN?

No. It is against the law to be paid to donate an organ. You do not get any money or gifts for being an organ donor. But, you will not have to pay any of the medical costs. The recipient's insurance will pay for the tests to see if you can be a donor, as well as the costs of the hospitalization. There are foundations that may help pay the cost of travel and hotel rooms for you and your family. Check with the transplant program to see if you qualify. Also, recipients are allowed to reimburse donors for out-of-pocket expenses such as travel and lodging.

6. ARE THERE ANY COSTS I HAVE TO PAY?

You do not pay for the tests to see if you can be a donor, including the hospital costs of the donor operation. However, you are responsible for the cost of your own health care after you donate the organ. Additionally, you may have expenses such as lost wages, travel, and child care.

7. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO RECOVER?

Most donors feel fully recovered within 60 days after surgery. The actual time depends on the type of operation you have. Your transplant team will give you an idea of how long it might take you to recover.

8. SHOULD I TAKE LEAVE FROM WORK TO RECOVER?

Most donors use both sick leave and vacation time to get better after the operation. Some federal and state employees can get special leave for organ donation. Some private employers also give special leave to organ donors. Talk to your employer and transplant team to learn what options you have.

9. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER I DECIDE TO BE A LIVING ORGAN DONOR?

First, you will meet with the transplant team. You will answer questions about your health, and have a physical exam. You will need to have many tests. You will have a psychological exam to make sure you have thought about the decision to donate. Finally, a match test will be done to make sure you and the person who will get your organ have a compatible, or matching, blood/tissue type.

You will not be able to donate your organ if:

- Your blood/tissue is not compatible with the recipients*
- You do not understand the advantages and disadvantages of donating your organ
- You are not acting on your own free will
- You are not healthy enough to donate
- You are being financially compensated to donate

** Some centers have ways to deal with incompatibility issues. If not, you may be able to donate to another patient. You can discuss these options with the transplant team.*

Unless you choose otherwise, all of your donor testing will be confidential and not shared with anyone outside the center, including your recipient.

10. WHERE DO I GO TO BE EVALUATED?

If you want to be a living organ donor for a specific person, it is best to go to his or her transplant center. If you live far from that person's transplant center, that center can arrange to have your tests done closer to you.

If you wish to donate to anyone in need, you can contact your nearest organ transplant program. If they cannot help you with your offer they may refer you to another program for evaluation.

11. ARE THERE ANY LONG-TERM EFFECTS FROM SURGERY?

Any surgery can affect your health over time. Your transplant team will discuss potential health risks with you. However, most donors do not report any long-term problems. If you are having problems as a result of your surgery, call your transplant program immediately. You will be asked to follow up with your transplant team for a minimum of two years after donation. It is important to see your primary doctor routinely for age-appropriate health screening.

12. WHAT HAPPENS IF I CHANGE MY MIND DURING THE DONOR TESTS?

You can decide to stop the evaluation process at any time. The transplant team will support your decision and keep your decision private. If you decide not to donate your organ, the center will only say their evaluation prevented you from donating. Be honest about your questions and uncertainties.