My boys need him more than I’ll ever need a second kidney.

That’s what Andrew said when he found out his dad, Donald, needed a living kidney donor. Donating his kidney was an easy choice because he wanted his two sons to have plenty of time with their grandfather. These days they spend a lot of that time on the basketball court. Andrew coaches his sons and their biggest fan never misses a game.
Maybe you’ve been waiting for a kidney on the transplant list for a few months – or maybe even a few years. Or maybe you know you may need to start dialysis soon and want to explore a kidney transplant. No matter your circumstance, you can get a lifesaving transplant faster if you find a living donor.

This guidebook is designed to help you find a living donor and give you suggestions on how to start the conversation with someone. Your living donor is out there. It’s not always a family member or friend that can be the best donor. Sometimes a total stranger or someone you never thought of could be the person that saves your life.

We’ll help you and your potential donors understand the transplant process and answer all the questions you both have.

Donors are true heroes. Let us help you find yours.

Understanding Living Donation

Every 10 minutes, another person is added to the national transplant waiting list – and over 80 percent are in need of a kidney. Some people spend an average of 4 to 7 years waiting for an organ on the National Organ Transplant Registry.

Many people don’t realize that living donation is an option. With a suitable living donor, you don’t have to wait years for your transplant. In fact, in some cases, your transplant can happen in as little as just a few months.

Benefits of Living Donation

Recipient

- Reduces your time waiting for a lifesaving organ
- Improves your recovery, as surgery can be scheduled when your health is optimal
- Allows you to get the best match and a kidney that can potentially last longer
- Shortens the wait time for a deceased organ for other people on the waiting list

Donor

- Gives you the opportunity to save someone’s life, whether that’s someone you know or love, or someone you don’t know who will now have the chance to live longer with the people they love
There are 3 types of living donation:

**Directed Donation:**
A donor specifically chooses who will receive their kidney.

**Non-Directed Donation:**
A donor decides to donate his or her kidney solely to give the gift of life to someone in need who they do not know.

**Paired Donations (Kidney Swaps):**
A donor may not be a match for one recipient they intended to donate to, but can enter a Kidney Swap Program where the donor’s organ then goes to another person who is a match, and the original recipient receives a kidney from another compatible donor on the Swap Program list.

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**Kidney Transplants by the numbers**

Since Hartford Hospital began performing kidney transplants in 1971, doctors have performed more than 2,500 kidney transplants.

- Over 1,600 from deceased donors.
- Over 850 from living donors.

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**Who can be a kidney donor?**

A suitable living donor should:

- Be at least 18 years old
- Have no history of kidney disease, heart disease, diabetes, active cancer, or other diseases that could complicate surgery

People shouldn’t rule themselves out if they simply think they wouldn’t qualify. Being a few pounds overweight, for example, does not disqualify you. One of our Living Kidney Donor Coordinators talks with each person to evaluate if they are a good candidate. If someone is unsure if they qualify, please call to speak with one of our coordinators.

And remember, even if a donor is not a match for an intended recipient, he or she can join a Kidney Swap Program that allows incompatible pairs to participate in a paired kidney exchange.
James spent months praying for a new kidney. He never expected it would come from someone praying just a few pews away.

Michael met James at church and knew about his reputation for helping people. When Michael learned that living organ donation could save James’ life, he decided it was his turn to help. Today they’re close friends who share a very special bond. And they’re back to their usual Sunday morning routine.
The chance to make a difference was most meaningful to me. There are so many people waiting. I felt like I had the opportunity and the ability – it was perfect.

Heidi’s desire to become a living donor was sparked by a simple thought: she just wanted to help someone. When she began the process, she had no idea who her kidney would go to. Two months later, she had her surgery and her kidney went to a man named Esteban. She got the chance to meet him, along with his three children – an experience the two will never forget.
The Steps to Becoming a Donor

Anyone considering living donation goes through a thorough evaluation to determine if they will be a good living donor candidate – think of it as a physical on steroids!

Step One: Reach Out
Donor completes an online referral form at HartfordHospital.org/LivingDonation or contacts one of our Living Donor Coordinators by phone at 833.222.7770.

Step Two: Intake Screening
The intake screening is done over the phone. It takes approximately 20-30 minutes. The Living Donor Coordinator gathers lots of information about the donor and answers any questions. If the donor is suitable based on this initial screening, he or she will be scheduled for testing.

Step Three: Testing
At the donor’s convenience, a donor candidate will undergo blood work to check for blood type and any infectious diseases, cross-matching, urine tests and compatibility testing.

Step Four: In-Person Evaluation
If all tests results are acceptable, the donor candidate would then meet in person with a living donor coordinator, a donor advocate, social worker, nephrologist (doctor who specializes in kidneys) and the transplant surgeon. This usually happens on one day and takes about eight hours.

At the same time, a donor will also have a CT scan to review the anatomy of the kidneys and blood vessels. Donors over the age of 65 will need a cardiac evaluation as well.

Additional testing or consultations may be ordered at any point based on results of testing.

Step Five: Approval or Denial
A few weeks after the in-person evaluation, the healthcare team will make a decision as to whether the donor is approved for surgery. The surgery date is always up to the donor. If this is a non-directed donation, then the donor would be put on the national Kidney Swap Program list.

Step Six: Before Surgery
Both a donor and recipient will have pre-operative appointments about one week prior to surgery. The donor will have final blood work and compatibility testing, an EKG, chest x-ray and receive final education and consent to surgery.
Word of Mouth
Use every opportunity to engage people with your story. You should of course think about your family and friends, but don’t forget new and old acquaintances, or people from places like book clubs, sports leagues, church groups, alumni groups, fitness classes, work, former classmates and military members, and beyond.

Using Local Media to Share Your Story
Local media love human interest stories, and if you can make your story compelling, many television, newspaper or radio stations would love the opportunity to share your story.

When reaching out to the media, keep the following in mind:
• Be an open book and don’t be shy about sharing your story
• Be articulate and try to present yourself well on camera
• What makes your story different? Reporters like to cover stories that are unique.
• Grab the media’s attention with an interesting way to advertise your need – maybe with a sign on the back of a car, for example.

Using Social Media to Share Your Story
Social media is a great way to share your story and help you find a living donor. Facebook, Instagram, and You Tube are some social media platforms that can help get the word out, although Facebook tends to be the most popular.

If you don’t have a Facebook page, we suggest you create one. You can also create a special Group page that is specific to your mission of finding a donor. This should take about 15 minutes.

How to Create a Facebook Page
2. Click to complete the sign-up form. You will enter your name, email address, and create a password.
3. To create a page, click the “create” tab and select Create Page.
4. Select the page to be a community based page, and then follow with your Page name, and category (“Cause” or “Community”)
5. You can start to customize your page by adding a profile picture and cover photo, and then start posting!
What a Donor can Expect During Transplant Surgery

Most kidney transplants are performed by minimally invasive surgery, meaning that the surgeon only makes three half-inch incisions and one four-inch incision rather than a large open cut. For the donor, the surgery takes about two to three hours. For the recipient, the surgery takes three to five hours.

1. Surgeon makes tiny incisions in the donor's abdomen.
2. Surgeon inserts a tiny camera to help them see the kidney better.
3. The kidney is carefully removed and then prepared to be transplanted into the recipient.

Donors can expect to spend one to two nights in the hospital following surgery. Recovery times can vary, but the average donor is back to work three to four weeks after surgery depending on the nature of their work. People who work more physical jobs will need to remain out of work until they are off of all restrictions. Donors are usually off all restrictions six to eight weeks after surgery.

How You Can Find a Living Donor

Starting the Conversation

Most kidney transplant patients say that they don’t know how to start the conversation about living donation. It can feel uncomfortable and awkward. Many people fear asking their children, spouses or loved ones for a variety of reasons. However, most people find that after having an honest and open conversation with those they love, their loved ones are eager to help.

It can be very uncomfortable to ask someone to donate a kidney. Instead, frame the conversation around needing help finding a living donor. This gives people the opportunity to volunteer without feeling pressured, and they may also help your story reach more people.

We often encourage people to think about extended family, coworkers, people they know from their place of worship, extracurricular activity or other social network. The more people you can share your story with, the better.

Knowing the process and having the answers to some common questions donors have will help dispel any fears and misconceptions.

Make sure you can communicate the following information:

- **Make your blood type known.** Let people know your blood type and the blood types of people who can donate to you. Let them know that even if the blood types are not compatible, the Kidney Swap Program can overcome that barrier.
- **Educate people about living donation.** Tell people why living donation is important.
- **Include your photo.** Pictures help people relate to you better and make your story more personal.
- **Encourage people to contact us to learn more.** Be sure to let interested people know that they should contact the Hartford Hospital Transplant Program’s Living Donor Coordinators at 833.222.7770.

Living Donor Champion Program

A Living Donor Champion is someone who helps you share your story and find a living donor on your behalf. They raise awareness about kidney disease, the transplant process and living donation.

Hartford Hospital runs a dedicated Living Donor Champion Program to help you and your loved ones with information that will make you feel comfortable starting the conversation with someone and giving you practical tools to help you find a living donor – like how to set up a Facebook page or contact your local media and share your story.

A high percentage of recipient candidates who attend this program go on to find a living donor and be transplanted.

The program is offered several times per year and consists of a series of three classes on a weekly basis. Visit HartfordHospital.org/Events to sign up for the next program.
Tips to make the most out of your Facebook Page

- If you’ve created a page, post a link to it on your personal page and ask others to Like or Share it.
- Post or share your link on various pages and communities on Facebook like: Living Kidney Donor Search, Living Kidney Donor Network, Need a kidney? Find your Donor, Find a Living Kidney Donor
- Post often. We recommend at least two to three times per week. Posting less may not be enough to catch people’s attention. Posting more may encourage people to unlike or unfollow your page to avoid too many posts in their newsfeed. People love photos and videos.
- Respond to anyone who comments or engages with your posts.
- Ask a tech-savvy friend or family member to help. Maybe you have a teenage child or grandchild that is too young to donate, but really wants to help. They may have great ideas to make your page stand out.
- Have key posts like your story and your initial ask for a donor pinned to the top of your page so they don’t get lost in all of your other posts.

Other Resources for Support and to Help you Spread Awareness

You can learn more about living donation and connect with others who have gone through a similar experience.

**National Kidney Foundation**
The National Kidney Foundation is the leading organization in the United States dedicated to the awareness, prevention and treatment of kidney disease.
[Kidney.org](http://Kidney.org).

**LifeChoice Donor Services**
LifeChoice is dedicated to fostering community and professional support of organ and tissue donation, providing compassionate care for families, and saving and improving lives.

**Hartford Hospital Transplant Services**
The Kidney Transplant Program at Hartford Hospital was established in 1971 and is one of the oldest and most successful in New England. Our Center for Living Donation was established in 2017.
[HartfordHospital.org/Transplant](http://HartfordHospital.org/Transplant)
[HartfordHospital.org/LivingDonation](http://HartfordHospital.org/LivingDonation)
What are the risks for being a living kidney donor?

This is a safe procedure, but all surgeries have risks. Risks include:
- Significant bleeding (rare)
- Blood transfusion (rare)
- Return to the operating room (very rare, <1 in 100)
- Wound complications (rare)
- Developing high blood pressure (risk may be slightly higher for donors)
- Renal failure over lifetime (may be slightly higher for donors)
- Death during the surgery (very low, estimated at 3 in 10,000)

What does a living kidney donor have to do to be tested and approved for organ donation?

Tests ensure donors are healthy enough to donate. It is a very thorough evaluation. There are three parts to the donation evaluation: medical tests, education about living donation and review and discussions with our living donation team. Our team includes social workers, kidney specialists, surgeons, dieticians, nurse coordinators and our living donor advocate.

What are the costs for a living donor?

Most expenses, including the donor’s evaluation and surgery, are paid by the recipient’s insurance. Donors will pay for their own travel expenses, including food, gasoline and hotel. A donor will need time off from work and may not have paid leave for this use. If you are an employee of Hartford HealthCare, you will receive six weeks of 100% paid leave to recover.

Our team will share information about what costs to expect, as well as information about tax benefits and how to get help with expenses.

What health care will a living kidney donor need after donating?

During recovery, the donor will be seen for follow-up care at Hartford Hospital. For their lifetime, we recommend donors have an annual physical, including blood pressure monitoring and blood tests that monitor kidney function. There are no special diets or medicines that need to be taken after kidney donation.

What if a donor needs a kidney some day?

If a living donor ends up needing a kidney one day, they are given priority on the wait list for a deceased organ, meaning they go right to the top of the list.

Why should I choose Hartford Hospital for my living kidney donation?

The Hartford Hospital Kidney Transplant Program has been one of the nation’s most respected leaders in organ donation and transplantation for nearly 40 years. Our team has completed more than 2,500 transplants and is one of the largest kidney transplant centers in the region. Our living donor kidney program began in 1971 and has served more than 850 living donors.