

How to Ask for a Living Kidney Donation



Lisa (right) received a kidney from her sister Michelle (left)



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

The First Step Is the Hardest

If you need a kidney transplant, your best option is to receive a kidney from a living donor. But that's easier said than done! The truth is, there is an enormous physical and emotional toll of living with end-stage kidney disease, not to mention the exhaustion of dialysis treatment. So it's not a surprise that finding a living donor can be overwhelming. **In fact, the conversation is so difficult that more than half of all people in need of a kidney transplant do not even ask one person to donate.**

Though you may not want to ask, often friends and family members are eager to spread the word for you and help identify potential living donors.

Throughout your journey to identify a living donor, remember that living kidney donation is your best option and sharing your need is the fastest way to identifying a potential living donor. In all your communications, remember to include:

- Your name
- Your blood type
- Contact information for your living donor nurse coordinator at the Ohio State Comprehensive Transplant Center

If you have any questions about your donor search, please contact your nurse coordinator at **614-293-6724, option 3.**

“I’m so appreciative of what my mother did. I take good care of the gift she gave me.”

Christie (left) received a kidney from her mother Barbara (right)



Finding Your Voice

To begin identifying potential living donors, start by discussing with your family and friends why your doctors are recommending a kidney transplant, explaining that living kidney donation is your best option.

It will be easier to initiate the conversation and find the right words to express your emotions with those closest to you. Each conversation you have will make you more confident to speak with others. If you feel you cannot find the right words to say in person, consider sending an email.

During your conversations, let others know that you understand living donation may not be an option for everyone. Acknowledge that this is their decision and that your relationship will not change if they choose not to donate.

The best option for a patient waiting for a kidney is to receive one from a living donor:

- Wait times for patients with living donors are reduced from years to months, potentially avoiding dialysis.
- Transplant recipients have better outcomes with kidneys from living donors.
- Kidneys transplanted from living donors may last nearly twice as long as kidneys from deceased donors.

Lanny (striped shirt with his wife Carol) received a kidney from his cousin Jay (blue shirt with his wife Ginny)



Identify a Living Donor Champion

You may not feel worthy to receive a living kidney donation, or you may feel guilty about making such a request. For these reasons, identify a **Living Donor Champion** from your close family and friends who can be your main supporter and voice for spreading the word about your kidney disease and need for transplantation. Your Living Donor Champion can provide contact information to the Ohio State Comprehensive Transplant Center for anyone who wants more information about the process or how to be tested, thus making it easier for someone to come forward and ask for more information.

What Your Champion Needs to Know

It is important for your Living Donor Champion to become educated about the living donation process before reaching out to others. Some resources available are:

- Ohio State's Living Donor Program webpage at wexnermedical.osu.edu/kidneydonor. Information can be found here about donor criteria, the evaluation and surgery process, risks and frequently asked questions.
- Contact the Ohio State Comprehensive Transplant Center at **614-293-6724, option 3** to answer any questions and get extra copies of wallet cards to pass out to potential donors.

Additional Strategies

- Start recruiting immediately.
- Make a list of all family, co-workers and additional groups to contact (include email addresses). Also consider reaching out to local places of worship.
- Start recruiting from friends and family first (siblings have the best chance of being great matches).
- Ask willing donors to complete the online health history questionnaire to start the process at osuwexmedlivingdonor.org or call **614-293-6724, option 3** to speak directly with a living donor team member at Ohio State.
- Ask possible donors if they will consider taking a blood test to determine if they can donate. Explain that if they are not a match, the Paired Kidney Donation program is another option. Additional information can also be found on the living donor webpage.
- Get creative! Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) are great platforms to spread the word, but some Champions have had great success by creating a webpage, print ads, t-shirts, buttons, car window stickers, flyers, church bulletins and even billboards.
- Don't stop recruiting until a week before surgery. Have as many potential donors as possible willing to be tested, in case of a last minute change.

Rollie made the decision to be a non-directed donor after watching Ohio State's television broadcast on organ donation and transplantation

Helpful Tip:

Before you begin talking about your need for a kidney, become informed about the living donation process. If there are questions you cannot answer, please contact us at **800-293-8965 option 3**.

To qualify as a living donor, an individual should be:

- 18-70 years of age
- Good overall physical and mental health
- Free from uncontrolled high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis and organ disease



Living Donor Communication Tools

Here are a few ways to contact your family and friends and potential strangers who may be willing to be donors. Keep in mind that there is no “right way” to communicate your need. However, it is certain that the longest route to transplantation is to say nothing and wait in silence for a deceased kidney donation.

Email/Letter:

Send your family and friends a letter, text or email updating them with your condition and the progress being made to find a living donor. The holiday season is an optimal time to send such a letter, however, a personal note can be sent at any time.

- Ask your Living Donor Champion to send emails and/or texts to family and friends on your behalf
- Explain your situation
- Educate on living kidney donation
- List contact information for Ohio State’s Comprehensive Transplant Center and link to the donor health history questionnaire: osuwxmedlivingdonor.org

Sample Living Donor Champion Letter:

Dear *(personalize letter)*,

I am writing to you about my (e.g., friend, sibling, spouse, partner), (Recipient), to let you know about (his/her/their) current health challenge and how you can help. This is not an easy letter for me to write, but I know that without sending this, someone who might be interested in helping won’t have that opportunity.

(Recipient) is a wonderful person. (Talk about the recipient’s work, family, volunteer work, involvement with the community and anything that could connect with other people.)

(Recipient) has end-stage “kidney disease or kidney failure” and has three options for treatment: dialysis, a kidney transplant from a deceased donor or a kidney transplant from a living donor. Dialysis is only a temporary solution. While (Recipient) can remain on dialysis for many years, it’s not a cure for kidney disease. It’s also physically exhausting and time-consuming, with treatment schedules as frequent as three times each week for up to four hours each session.

Since I care so much for (Recipient), I’m doing everything I can to help find him/her/them a living kidney donor. (Give a brief history of Recipient’s health challenges, whether on dialysis, had a previous transplant, how long waiting, how many other people have tried to help, etc. Potentially include a picture. If Recipient has made many positive lifestyle changes, mention them. If you are unable to donate, explain why. If Recipient isn’t on dialysis, talk about how difficult it is to have a normal life while being on kidney dialysis. If on dialysis, describe the routine.)

(Recipient) needs a new kidney, and we hope you will consider being tested to be a donor. I know this is a big request. But I make it on behalf of someone who devotes every day of his/her/their life to making a difference to his/her/their family and friends. If you can help, please take the online health history questionnaire at osuwxmedlivingdonor.org to see if you might qualify. If you know anyone who might, please forward this on. Forwarding this to your family, friends, work, school, congregation or any other communities you belong to would be most gratefully appreciated.

*If you would like to learn more about living kidney donation, please feel free to call me at *(insert phone number)*. I want to be as helpful as possible. You can also visit wexnermedical.osu.edu/kidneydonor or contact the Ohio State Comprehensive Transplant Center at **614-293-6724, option 3** to have a confidential conversation and get answers to any questions. Thank you so much!*

Online Networking

Social networking provides several tools for connecting with potential living donors. It is easy to connect with your entire social network and allows for your friends to share with others outside your immediate social circle. Additionally, you can keep followers updated and link to other living donation websites.

Facebook: Create a Facebook page that people can “like” to follow your journey.

- Share your personal journey
- Post news stories about successful donations
- Ask for a living donor
- Share the donor health history questionnaire link: osuwxmedlivingdonor.org
- Post often and encourage people to share the post

YouTube: Make a video telling your story and share on your Facebook page.

Church Bulletin Listing

Post a short request in the bulletins of places of worship of family and friends. Since all major religions practiced in the U.S. support organ donation and consider it a generous act of caring, you may find potential donors from the congregation.

Bulletin Example 1:

You can save a life ... living kidney donor needed. Just a few weeks ago, (insert Recipient's name and community) was diagnosed with end-stage kidney disease, and (his/her/their) best chance of survival lies in the hands of someone willing to be a living kidney donor. What can you do? If you're healthy, age 18-70 and willing to donate a kidney, (Recipient) may be able to accept the transplant. If after prayerful consideration you might be moved to undergo surgery and be a living donor for (Recipient), information on the process can be found at wexnermedical.osu.edu/kidneydonor or contact (Recipient's) Living Donor Champion at (insert phone and/or email address).

Bulletin Example 2:

Prayers for (Recipient), who is in need of a kidney transplant. If you're willing to give the "gift of life," please take the online health history questionnaire at osuwxmedlivingdonor.org or or contact (his/her/their) Living Donor Champion at (insert phone and/or email address).

Create a Flier

- Create a flier to hang in local area shops.
- Include your name and a brief summary of your story.
- Also include Ohio State's Living Donor webpage and link to the online health history questionnaire

NonConventional Advertising

- **Radio Ad:** Reach out to your local radio station to ask them if they can share your story.
- **Car Window Ad:** Consider having your Living Donor Champion place a simple donor request on their rear car window including their contact information. Watch this video for other unique messaging ideas at go.osu.edu/kidneycarad.



James, kidney recipient (left) with his living donor, Craig (right)

Ohio State Comprehensive Transplant Center
300 W. 10th Ave., 11th Floor
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<http://wexnermedical.osu.edu/kidneydonor>

For more information, call
614-293-6724, option 3 or
email LivingKidneyDonorProgram@osumc.edu



George (seated), pictured with his family, received a kidney from his stepdaughter Tammy (left)

Carl, pictured with his wife Louise, received a kidney from his daughter-in-law



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