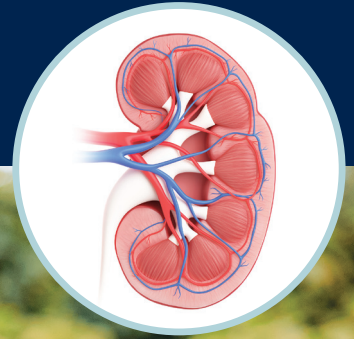


The Kidney's Hidden Strength

Did you know you can donate a kidney and live a long, healthy life? This is possible thanks to a little-known superpower of the kidneys. When one is donated, the remaining kidney adapts quickly to do the work of two.



In fact, many kidney donors say they feel completely back to normal within a few months.



That's very good news, because kidneys are the organ most in demand, and not enough are available from deceased donors.



This means someone in need of a new kidney can spend years on dialysis, which can be challenging. Many don't survive the wait.



Read on to learn the surprising benefits of kidney donation and the four things all donors should know.

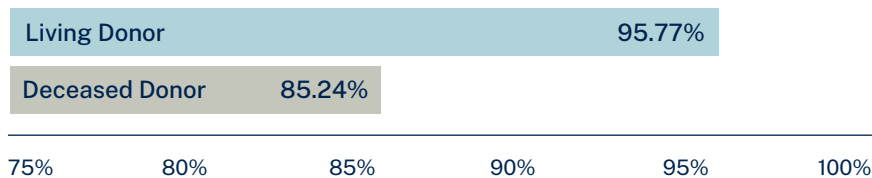
6 Feel-Good Reasons to Become a Living Kidney Donor



You Can Give the Gift of Life

By donating one of your kidneys, you can significantly reduce a recipient's time on the transplant waitlist and help them move forward with surgery and their new life. They'll be stronger and healthier going into surgery. They get to prepare for the procedure. And a living donor kidney is often healthier and lasts longer than one from a deceased donor. People who receive a kidney from a living donor often have better outcomes and higher survival rates.

UCSF HEALTH RECIPIENT SURVIVAL RATES AT 3 YEARS*



Many kidney donors donate to a family member or friend, but you don't have to donate to someone you know. And if you're not a match for your loved one, we can help arrange an exchange of donors. That way, your loved one receives a kidney from someone who is a match, and your kidney goes to someone else in need.



Your Costs Are Covered

The recipient's medical insurance covers all your medical costs for donation, including tests, office visits, surgery, hospitalization and follow-up care. In many cases, your pay is also covered while you're off work. Under California law, most employees donating an organ are entitled to paid leave for up to 60 days.

We can help donors with expenses that aren't covered by insurance, including travel and lodging. We connect you with resources such as Donor Shield and the National Living Donor Assistance Center, which help donors recoup these expenses.



You're in Expert Hands

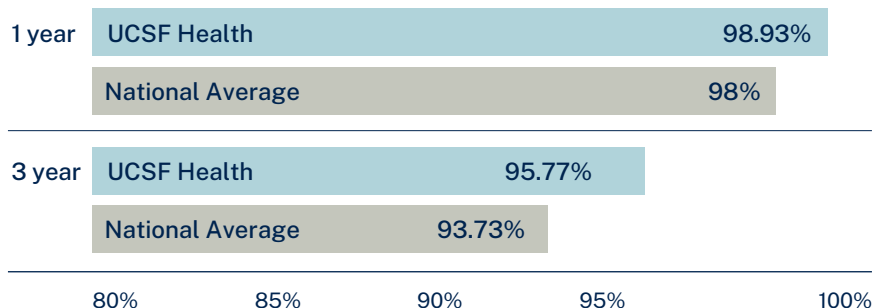
UCSF Health's Kidney Transplant Program is one of the best in the country and is designated a center of excellence by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Our surgeons have performed thousands of living kidney donor transplants in the last 30 years and continue to do more than any other medical center in California.

Our living donor kidney transplant program supports donors through evaluation, surgery and recovery. The team includes surgeons, nephrologists, registered nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, dietitians, social workers and other providers. Everyone on the team has expertise in caring for donors.

In the decades since the first successful living donor kidney transplant, medical advances have made the procedure easier and safer for donors. UCSF Health has been at the forefront of many of those innovations. Our experience and expertise are reflected in our outstanding outcomes.

The survival rates for people who receive a living donor kidney transplant at UCSF Health are consistently among the highest in the country.

LIVING DONOR RECIPIENT SURVIVAL RATES*



*Source: Scientific Registry of Transplant Recipients (January 2026)



Your Safety Is Our Priority

Every step of the way, we make sure that donation is right for you. Living donation is entirely voluntary. You're free to change your mind at any point before the surgery. We fully support you, whatever you decide.

Potential donors undergo careful preparation to make sure they're physically, psychologically and emotionally fit to donate. Preparation includes tests and consultations with doctors, a social worker and sometimes a transplant psychiatrist. We're here to answer all your questions and address any concerns.

As an extra safeguard to make sure your interests are fully protected, you also have a dedicated patient advocate. Your Independent Living Donor Advocate (ILDA) is not part of the transplant team and has no stake in whether you donate a kidney.

We recognize the extraordinary act of generosity involved in a living kidney donation. We honor your gift by making sure you receive the best possible care.



You Touch Many Lives

Kidney failure takes its toll on more than just the patient. It's also hard on family members and friends who are caring for their loved one on dialysis. When you become a living donor, you help everyone involved.

That ripple effect spreads even further because there are not enough kidneys to go around. Every living donor transplant means one less person on the kidney waitlist. The shorter the list, the better the odds for those who are still waiting.

This is especially important in California, where the transplant waitlist is longer than in other parts of the country.



Giving Feels Amazing

Living donors say they get as much out of donating as they give. In one survey, 97% said they would be willing to donate again; less than 3% said they weren't sure. No one said they wouldn't do it again.

UCSF Health has a correspondence program for donors and recipients who don't know each other and want to connect. It's a personal choice, and donors and recipients can choose to communicate at any time, even long after transplant.

Donors tell us their incredible act of selflessness is deeply fulfilling. Mindy, who gave a kidney to her partner Patty at UCSF Health, says being a donor was a beautiful experience, and life afterward feels amazingly normal and free.



Read more about Mindy on page 5.

Am I Eligible to Be a Donor?

Donors must be:

- 18 years or older (with the exception of emancipated minors)
- At or able to reach a BMI below 35 before surgery (those with a BMI of 35 to 40 can still apply to be a donor and then remain on hold until they reach their BMI goal)
- Nonsmokers or able to quit at least six weeks before surgery
- Not pregnant
- In good physical and mental health
- Able to understand the risks of surgery
- Able to follow instructions on preparing for and recovering from surgery



To learn more and see our screening questionnaire, visit our [Becoming a Living Kidney Donor](#) page by scanning the QR code.

ucsfhealth.org/treatments/living-kidney-donor-transplant





The donation process is a big commitment

We do extensive testing and a comprehensive evaluation to make sure you're physically, emotionally and psychologically fit to be a donor. You may have to take time off work for testing and evaluation appointments, such as:

- Blood tests
- Diagnostic tests, including MRI, chest X-ray, electrocardiogram (EKG) and abdominal ultrasound
- Talking with members of our transplant team

Donors commit to not smoking or getting pregnant before donating. Some people may need to lose weight before surgery. We can refer you to a program for help.

In the days before surgery, you may need to take medications and specific steps to help your body prepare. Our team will explain these instructions in detail.



Laparoscopic surgery shortens your recovery

Most kidney donors can have laparoscopic (minimally invasive) surgery. The surgeon makes very small incisions and uses a thin, flexible scope with a tiny camera at the end to help remove the kidney. We also offer state-of-the-art robot-assisted donor surgery. The procedure takes about three hours.

All surgeries have a risk of complications. However, laparoscopic surgery is less painful and has a shorter recovery time, as well as a very low rate of complications. You'll have tiny scars on your abdomen—a few puncture marks and one slightly larger incision where the kidney was removed. The larger incision may be hidden in or below your belly button.



You'll need to take time off

After donating a kidney laparoscopically, most donors spend an additional one to two days in the hospital. You will have a catheter in your bladder to drain urine during the first 24 hours after surgery. You may also have a tube in your abdomen to drain blood or fluids.

When you go home, you'll continue to recover. It's important to take it easy during this time, avoiding strenuous activity and heavy lifting. Expect to take three or four weeks off work.



You'll need lifelong check-ins

Your first follow-up is about one to two weeks after surgery, so we can make sure you're recovering well. More follow-ups are scheduled for six, 12 and 24 months after donation, mostly for lab work.

You won't have to take any long-term medications or follow a special diet. We recommend establishing care with a primary care provider who can monitor your overall health and kidney function throughout your life.

90,000

People are waiting for a kidney transplant in the U.S.

6,500

Living donors gave a kidney to someone in need in 2025

4,700

People die each year waiting for a kidney



Patient Story

A Gift of More Tomorrows Together



Soon after Mindy and Patty started dating, Patty began dialysis for kidney failure and went on the transplant waitlist. They built their life together with their three young sons, but Mindy constantly saw the challenges and limitations of dialysis as Patty waited for a kidney.

After a decade of waiting and worrying about their future, Mindy decided to take matters into her own hands.

Mindy knew that she wasn't a kidney donor match for Patty. So she began researching kidney donor exchange. A swap would allow Mindy to donate a kidney to someone in need, and in turn, Patty would receive a kidney from a different matched donor.

When Mindy revealed her plan, Patty had concerns about how organ donation would affect Mindy's health. Mindy says she understood the risks of donating an organ, but she was determined to help her partner and wouldn't take no for an answer. Mindy wanted to give Patty a chance to live to see their grandchildren. They agreed to move forward with Mindy's donation.

“Watching someone on dialysis is very hard. I donated my kidney because I wanted to help. I wanted to see Patty live a happy, full life.”

Mindy
Living kidney donor

After Mindy gave a kidney and Patty received her new kidney from a donor, they recovered from their surgeries on the same floor at UCSF Health. Together, they walked laps around the floor to regain strength. “I would call her from my room and tell her I was coming to pick her up,” says Mindy, smiling at the memory. “It reminded me of when we were first dating.”

Three months later, Mindy was back to her regular routine. Recovery took longer for Patty, and she’s working on growing stronger. But they’re both enjoying Patty’s freedom from dialysis and the ability to hike or travel whenever they want. And the year after Patty received her new kidney, their first grandchild was born.

Mindy has no regrets about donating and no worries about her own health. “Now that we’re both healthy, I can see a future for us,” she says. “I would absolutely do it again.”



“This works. You can live with one kidney and be OK. I don’t feel any different than I did before giving a kidney.”

Mindy

Living kidney donor



UCSF Health



To find out more about our living donor kidney transplant program, email living.donor@ucsf.edu or visit our Living Kidney Donor Transplant website.



ucsfhealth.org/treatments/living-kidney-donor-transplant