

Living donors may benefit transplant patients

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For a patient awaiting a new organ—namely a liver or kidney—living donation provides a viable alternative and can often shorten a recipient's wait time.

"Living donor donations are important because they mean more [patients](#) can get the organs they need faster," said Dr. Zakiyah Kadry, chief of the Division of Transplantation at Penn State Health. "It's also good because studies have shown that a patient who has the option to receive an organ from a [live donor](#) is more likely to survive the [waiting list](#), especially liver patients, because they have more transplant options than waiting for an organ from a deceased donor."

Kadry said that each year about half of Penn State Health's kidney transplants and about 5 percent of [liver transplants](#) come from live donors. Penn State Health Milton S. Hershey Medical Center is the only hospital in central Pennsylvania that performs multiple types of organ transplants including living donor liver and kidney transplants and pediatric kidney transplants.

An organ from a live donor may take less time to become fully functional in a patient's system than one from a deceased donor. That's because rather than packing the organ in ice for hours, doctors transfer it from one patient directly to the next within an hour.

When doctors decide a patient needs a liver or [kidney transplant](#), they discuss whether live donation is an option. Most people with [kidney failure](#) can receive a live donation, though some patients with liver disease can't.

A potential donor must undergo medical testing and education before donating a kidney or part of a liver. A donor-advocate team independent of medical professionals caring for the ill patient ensures there is no conflict of interest.

"Whether you're donating a kidney or part of your liver, it's a big deal," Kadry said. "You are undergoing [major surgery](#) that you wouldn't need to undergo only to help someone else."

Background screening of donors is extensive, but Kadry said that's good for everyone involved.

"Sometimes potential donors find out about health issues that they never knew they had," she said. "Then they can at least deal with those and get them treated even if they can't donate."

Live donation also makes scheduling the surgery easier, which eliminates some stress for the patient and his or her friends and family. "They know they have an end in sight," Kadry said.

When a live kidney donor's blood type isn't compatible with the recipient, he or she can still donate the organ to someone else. That can set off a chain of transplants nationwide, ultimately resulting in the patient receiving a [kidney](#) from a compatible donor.

Because liver transplantation is more complex, a patient must personally know his or her [donor](#). "It doesn't need to be a relative though," Kadry said. "It can be a neighbor, colleague, friend or someone from their church."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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