



## The Greatest GIFT

When Essie McCartney needed a kidney transplant after years of living with lupus, her husband, Howard, became her living donor.

The Cedar Hill couple, now both 53, underwent the transplant at Baylor University Medical Center (Baylor Dallas) in January 2000, and it was a tremendous success. Almost four years later, Essie is doing very well with Howard's kidney, which started working immediately after the transplant. "My health and energy have improved so much, it's like night and day," she says.

Aside from the normal pain associated with healing, Howard experienced no physical restrictions related to his kidney donation. In fact, he was back at his job as a financial advisor after only three weeks. "Physically, I never even think about the fact that I have only one kidney," he says.

Essie believes the experience has brought them closer. "When you stop and think about what actually happened—that I'm doing so well now and may even be alive because of this—it just creates a special bond."

"I don't think of it as a grand gesture—it was just the right thing to do," Howard says. "When you genuinely care about someone and have the opportunity to impact their life in this way, I don't see how you can not make that choice."

► **Hear the McCartneys' story in a video called "Making a Difference: Kidney Donation," which explains the process of living kidney donation. To receive a copy, call 1-800-4BAYLOR.**

# Giving of Yourself

## Living Kidney Donation Is a Life-Changing Event

BY DEBORAH PADDISON

If someone you love needs a kidney transplant, would you consider being a living kidney donor?

According to the United Network of Organ Sharing (UNOS), more than 82,000 people nationwide are waiting for a donor organ, 50,000 of whom are waiting for a kidney. While the demand for kidneys increases every year, the rate of cadaveric organ donation has remained flat. Today, more people are deciding to become living kidney donors, giving the gift of life.

Larry Melton, M.D., Ph.D., transplant nephrologist on the medical staff at Baylor University Medical Center (Baylor Dallas) and interim medical director of kidney transplantation for Baylor Regional Transplant Institute, answers some common questions about this procedure.

**Who can donate a kidney?** A living donor often is a family member of the recipient (living related donation). However, a donor does not have to be biologically related. The donor also can be someone emotionally related to the recipient, such as a good friend, spouse or in-law (living unrelated donation).

**Are there any health requirements?** To donate a kidney, the donor must be in good health and have normal kidney function and anatomy.

**How does living donation affect the donor?** To uphold the principle of "first do no harm," the health of the donor is paramount. As long as the donor is evaluated thoroughly and cleared for donation, he or she can lead a normal life after the surgery with only one kidney. But if removing a kidney might cause future medical problems for a donor, we would not proceed.

**Is there an age limit for kidney donation?** This is analyzed on a case-by-case basis. Kidney function declines with age, so a 70-year-old kidney would not be donated to a 25-year-old. However, Baylor has performed several transplants using kidney donors in their 60s to recipients in their 50s.

**What's included in the evaluation process?** The prospective donor and recipient are screened to make sure they have compatible blood types. If the blood types are compatible, then the donor undergoes medical tests for general health, kidney anatomy and kidney function. A psychological evaluation also is conducted.

**What medical conditions might disqualify someone from donating?**

Diabetes and high blood pressure, among others, because over time they can lead to loss of kidney function, and it would compromise the donor's health to remove a kidney.

**Can obese individuals be kidney donors?** Yes, as long as an evaluation by the donor surgeon indicates that the operation could be performed safely.

**How long is the recovery from the donor surgery?** In most cases laparoscopic kidney removal is performed, so donors usually can go home the next day and resume their normal activities within two to four weeks.

**Why should I donate a kidney?** Living kidney donation provides an enormous health benefit to the recipient, and it bonds a donor and recipient in a fashion that many people cannot understand. Virtually all donors report a great deal of emotional satisfaction.

► **Baylor Regional Transplant Institute integrates the transplant programs at Baylor Dallas and Baylor All Saints Medical Center in Fort Worth, making Baylor one of the nation's top transplant centers. If you or someone you love needs a kidney transplant, call 1-800-4BAYLOR (1-800-422-9567).**

