

# I just wanted to give someone one of my kidneys

It's a freezing cold day in December when I first meet Babes Fairhurst. She welcomes me into her little cottage and I am immediately bowled over by this bubbly blonde lady wearing denim shorts, knee high brightly coloured stripy socks and fire engine red Doc Martin boots laced up with spotted ribbons. You'd be forgiven for thinking that this was what makes her so ... well, special. But you'd be very wrong. Babes is one of just 463 people in the UK (from 2007 to the end of 2015) who have woken up one day and decided to donate one of their kidneys to a complete stranger.

"Well, I just knew that there were so many people waiting for a kidney transplant and I had done a bit of research so I had found out that we only need one kidney to be completely healthy. So I thought "why not?" I must be odd but I don't know how many people there are in the UK but even if just a tiny fraction of us healthy ones gave a kidney then there would be nobody left on the transplant waiting list waiting for a kidney would there? I just don't understand people sometimes.....

I'd been thinking about donating a kidney for some time but on New Year's Day it became my New Year's resolution. This is THE year I AM going to do this, I said to Tone (Tony – Babes' husband) "This is it Tone, I am going to donate my spare kidney this year and nothing is going to stop me."

So the next thing I did was Google 'how do I give someone one of my kidneys?' and that search told me to 'phone my nearest hospital and speak to one of the transplant coordinators there.

I phoned Derriford Hospital and left a message asking one of the coordinators to call me back. Sarah Stacey (transplant coordinator) called me back and we talked about what giving a kidney to someone would involve. She was really lovely and we got on well right away. Sarah told me that at any stage I could back out. It was funny really because even on the day I went in to have the kidney removed and I was being taken into theatre, she kept reassuring me that I could still change my mind if I wanted to.

Sarah explained that I would need to have my blood and general health checked and that I would have a couple of interviews to make sure I understood the implications of what I was about to do and that nobody was putting pressure on me to do it or paying me to do it. I wasn't bothered about any of the tests; I was really excited. The thought that I could actually save someone's life is an amazing thing and even now when I think about how whoever got my kidney must be living their new life, I smile, every time.

Since Tone retired from the Police service we have run a cleaning business together and the summer is our busiest time. So I asked Sarah if we could do all the tests as soon as possible but could I wait until after our busiest time to come into hospital to have the kidney removed as our work is physically hard work and I couldn't leave it all to Tone to do. Sarah said that it would happen at my own pace. It finally turned out that I donated in the September as they (NHS Blood and Transplant) had found that my kidney was a perfect match for someone on the waiting list.

Over the next couple of months I went up to Derriford quite a few times to meet Sarah and have all sorts of blood tests done. I also met with a psychologist, a surgeon and of course all the nurses who took blood from me for testing and who did all the scans and x-rays. Everyone was really helpful and some just couldn't believe that I wanted to give a kidney to someone that I didn't know.

I can't pretend that all my friends and family were on-board with me. Even Tone wasn't very happy about it as he had recently had some minor kidney problems himself. But he knows that once my mind is made up – that's it! And he came with me for my tests and when I finally went in to donate the kidney.

I was called in in September to donate the kidney. I had found out that in some cases a donated kidney can trigger a chain of transplants and I had hoped that my donated kidney might be able to do that. Imagine helping all those people in that chain who were just waiting for one kidney to complete the missing link! But as it turned out my donated kidney was a perfect match for a lady in Manchester. So the kidney I gave her saved her life. It is such a privilege to be able to do something like that. Even as I was being wheeled down to the operating theatre I was so excited. When I woke up Tone was there waiting for me. I was out of hospital in a couple of days and back to work in a week.

The following year I had to go into hospital again for a minor procedure – nothing to do with my kidney donation. The lady doctor who looked after me chatted to me about my kidney donation. She was fascinated. A few days later she came to visit me again just before I went home and told me that she too was now about to donate one of her kidneys. She called me at home a few months later to say that she had done it!



*This is THE year I AM going to do this, I said to Tone (Tony – Babes' husband) 'This is it Tone, I am going to donate my spare kidney this year and nothing is going to stop me.'*

So, that's two kidneys into the system and two people saved. I wish I could let everyone know how wonderful it is to realise that you have saved or seriously improved someone's life by giving up your spare kidney. There is no feeling like it. It is just wonderful."

*In this issue of Kidney Life we start a major new series exploring the world of living kidney donation. Our first interview is with Babes Fairhurst who decided she would like to give one of her kidneys to a complete stranger. In the summer issue of Kidney Life we interview a transplant coordinator, Sarah Stacey, who talks us through the necessarily thorough and highly regulated process of living organ donation. And our series concludes with an interview with a living related organ donor. All interviews will appear on the NKF website in the new 'perspective' section*

## Facts

The HTA (Human Tissue Authority) determines the criteria for altruistic (and all living) kidney donation in the UK and offers a very important safeguard to both potential donors and potential recipients. The Human Tissue Act is in place to ensure that a potential donor has not been coerced in any way into offering an organ (kidney, or in some cases a part of another organ), that no financial incentives have been offered or accepted and that the donor fully understands the implications of volunteering for surgery. All potential living donors need to be HTA approved before a living donation may take place in the UK.

### Statistics

Transplant figures for the year 2015-2016 are not yet available, but during the year 2014-2015 kidney and combined kidney and pancreas transplant figures were down on the previous year.

	April 2014 – March 2015	April 2013 – March 2014
Kidney transplants from deceased donors	1880	1940
Combined kidney/pancreas transplants from deceased donors	173	188
Living kidney transplants (which include)	1052	1115
Altruistic kidney transplants	107	118

## What to do if you would like to donate a kidney.

Obviously most readers of and many of the contributors to Kidney Life are kidney patients themselves and so this bit is certainly not for us! But if you know of someone who might be considering this wonderful gift there are many people who can offer constructive and friendly assistance to them and much by way of useful information is now available.

A guidance leaflet on altruistic donation may be downloaded directly from the NKF website at: <http://www.kidney.org.uk/home/news-2/altruistic-donation-information-process/>

## Give a Kidney - one is enough

Invaluable help and information may be obtained from 'Give a Kidney - one is enough' at [www.giveakidney.org](http://www.giveakidney.org). Many of the people working for Give a Kidney are themselves altruistic donors and set up this charity to support other people and their families through the process of donating a kidney.

Information may also be found on all forms of donation at [www.nhsbt.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsbt.nhs.uk)