

Knee Cartilage Transplant FAQs

How is a “match” found for my knee?

A cartilage transplant is not like an organ transplant, therefore, you don't need any bloodwork or testing for "matching." The measurements of your knee are analyzed and a similar size "match" of the donor is needed.

Where does the graft come from?

Allografts, or grafts donated from another person, come from voluntarily donated human tissue and donors that are deceased. A deceased donor has documented his or her choice to be a donor through registries like Donate Life America. Or, the deceased person's family has made the decision. Cartilage donation, just like organ donation, represents a gift from the donor and the donor's family.

How long will it take to find a match?

This depends on many factors, including whether a donor with the necessary size requirements becomes available. Please keep in mind, this requires a young, healthy person to have passed away.

For most patients, a graft is available within a few months.

What happens once a graft is available for me?

Our office has a process - insurance verification, keeping in touch with the tissue bank, and surgeon notification once a graft is available. We will keep you updated by phone once a graft is available for you. Once the surgeon has accepted the graft, the following must happen:

- You will need to schedule a "history and physical" appointment with your medical doctor. This is your medical clearance to have surgery. Our surgery department will coordinate with your medical doctor to make sure all required pre-surgery steps are completed.
- Typically, we have a limited amount of time to implant for surgery. Certain types of cartilage transplants involve live cartilage cells. Generally we try to implant a graft within 21 days.

How safe is a cartilage transplant?

The cartilage graft goes through multiple rounds of rigorous testing for diseases/bacteria, including screens for HIV, Hepatitis B and C, and syphilis. Testing is required by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB). The possibility of disease and/or infection transmission from cartilage transplantation is extremely low, estimated to be less than one in 1.6 million.

Cartilage is an "immunoprivileged" site in the body. Immunoprivileged means without lymphatic or blood vessels, so it's isolated from the immune system and extremely unlikely to cause rejection. Cartilage transplant patients do not need to take immunosuppressive drugs (which are typically required to prevent rejection in other types of organ transplants).

Will I be able to discover the identity of my donor?

Donation usually remains anonymous. In some cases recipients and donor families may wish to contact each other. Efforts to unite a donor family with a recipient are typically coordinated by the Organ Procurement Organization (OPO). The Pathways program is a way for the recipient to write a letter to the donor's family. Their vision is: The family of every organ and tissue donor will receive acknowledgement from someone who has benefited from their loved one's gift. If you are interested in participating in the Pathways Program or to learn more, visit www.1000thanks.com.