

# ORGAN AND TISSUE DONATION



National  
Kidney  
Foundation™

[www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org)

## If I needed a kidney or some other vital organ to live... would I be able to get one?

**Maybe.** Some people who need organ transplants cannot get them because of a shortage of donations. The national waiting list for organ transplants grows longer every day. Thousands die each year while waiting for a transplant of a vital organ, such as a kidney, heart, or liver.

## How are organs and tissues for transplantation obtained?

Organs can be **donated by people at the time of death** (deceased donors) or by **living donors**.

A living donor may be a relative, friend, or possibly someone who does not know the recipient but wishes to be a donor for someone in need.

This brochure provides information about organ and tissue donation at the time of death. For more information about living donation, visit **[www.kidney.org/livingdonors](http://www.kidney.org/livingdonors)**

## How are donated organs and tissues distributed?

The federal government contracts with an independent organization, called

the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), to manage the distribution of organs donated by individuals at the time of death (deceased donors).

Because of the shortage of donations, transplant candidates' names are placed on a waiting list. Guidelines have been established to ensure that all patients on the waiting list have a fair chance at receiving the organ they need regardless of age, sex, race, lifestyle, or social status. Organs are also distributed based on needs and medical criteria.

Donated tissues are distributed through a separate process, which is coordinated by various tissue banks.

### **How are donated organs removed?**

Donated organs are removed in a sterile, surgical procedure. In the case of a deceased donor, the outward appearance of the body usually will not prevent an open-casket funeral. However, it is important to discuss the impact of donating specific organs and tissues on the viewing with the recovery professional, who can work with the funeral director to address your concerns.

## What organs and tissues can be donated?

**One donor can benefit many other people.** Organs and tissues that can be transplanted include: the kidneys, corneas, heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, heart valves, bone, bone marrow, small bowel, veins, skin, tendons, and ligaments. You may specify what organs and/or tissues you wish to donate.

## Will the quality of treatment be altered if a person is a declared organ donor?

**Absolutely not.** Donation is not even considered until all possible efforts to save a person's life have failed. The criteria used to determine death are based on strict medical and legal standards. The determination of death must be made by doctors who are not involved in the organ donation or transplant process. Potential organ donors are declared dead and then maintained on ventilators to keep all vital organs healthy until the donation can take place.

## Is there a system for giving families the option of donating the organs and tissues of a loved one who has died?

**Yes.** All hospitals are required by law to have a “Required Referral” system in place. Under this system, the hospital must notify the local Organ Procurement Organization (OPO) about all potential donors.

If the OPO determines that organ and/or tissue donation is appropriate in a particular case, they may have a representative contact the family to discuss donation. In many states, the next of kin are asked to sign a consent form for donation. This may be the case even if the patient had indicated a desire to be a donor.

Individuals who have made a donation decision should inform their family members.

## Will my family be required to make any payments for the removal of my organs or tissues?

**No.** The donor’s family is not responsible for any recovery expenses. The cost of the donation will be absorbed by the transplant center, the recipient’s insurance coverage or, in some cases, by the federal government.

## Do religious groups support organ and tissue donation?

**Yes.** Religious leaders the world over favor such donations as expressions of the highest humanitarian ideals. This gift of life is consistent with the principles of most religious and ethical beliefs. If you have questions about your religion's position concerning organ and tissue donation, consult your religious leader.

## What happens when someone donates his or her body to medical science?

If someone donates his or her body to a medical center for anatomical study, arrangements for this type of donation must be made in advance of memorial services with the medical center. Burial arrangements and expenses may be taken care of by the medical center after the anatomical study has been completed.

## How can I become a donor?

- Simply visit **[www.donatelife.net](http://www.donatelife.net)** to sign up for an online registry in your area. This is the best way to indicate that you'd like to be a donor. If you need additional help, you can call Donate Life America at 800.355.7427 or 804.377.3580.

- Discuss your decision with your family members or other loved ones.
- It's that easy!

## What else can I do to advance this life-sustaining and life-enhancing program?

Be sure to tell others about the organ and tissue donor program. The more donors who become available, the more frequently transplantation can be used for the benefit of others. To learn more about organ and tissue donation, contact the National Kidney Foundation.

### Remember...

- Discuss your feelings about organ and tissue donation with your family and friends. **Decide whether or not you wish to be a donor** and then tell your family members and other loved ones of your decision.
- Visit **[www.donatelife.net](http://www.donatelife.net)** and click on your state to join your state's donor registry.
- **Tell others about your decision**, especially your family members and your physician.
- **Pass along this brochure** to your friends.

**Organ donation...the gift of life.**

The **National Kidney Foundation** is the leading organization in the U.S. dedicated to the awareness, prevention, and treatment of kidney disease for hundreds of thousands of healthcare professionals, millions of patients and their families, and tens of millions of Americans at risk.

Help fight kidney disease.

Learn more at **[www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org)**



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**Awareness. Prevention. Treatment.**

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