



<http://www.womenshealth.gov>

1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

Organ Donation and Transplantation

Q: What is organ donation and transplantation?

A: Organ transplantation is the surgical removal of an organ or tissues from one person (the donor) and placing it in another person (the recipient). Organ donation is when you allow your organs or tissues to be removed and given to someone else. Most donated organs and tissues are from people who have died. But, a living person can donate some organs. Blood, stem cells, and platelets can also be donated.

Q: What is the status of organ donation and transplantation in the United States?

A: The number of people needing a transplant continues to rise faster than the number of donors. About 4,100 transplant candidates are added to the national waiting list each month. Each day, about 77 people receive organ transplants. However, about 18 people die each day waiting for transplants that can't take place because of the shortage of donated organs.

There are now more than 105,000 people on the waiting list for solid organ transplants. Experts suggest that each of us could save or help as many as 50 people by being an organ and tissue donor.

Q: Who can be an organ donor?

A: There are no age limits on who can be an organ donor. Newborns as well as senior citizens have been organ donors. If you are younger than 18, you must have a parent's or guardian's consent. If you are 18 years or older, you can show you want to be an organ and tissue donor by signing a donor card. You can download and print an organ donor card at <ftp://ftp.hrsa.gov/organdonor/newdonorcard.pdf>.

Carry the card in your wallet. In some states, you can state your intent to be an organ donor on your driver's license. To learn more about state organ and tissue donor registries, visit <http://organdonor.gov/donor/registry.shtm>.

If you want to be an organ donor, make sure your family knows your wishes. Your family may be asked to sign a consent form in order for your donation to occur. You may also want to tell your family doctor, lawyer, and religious leader that you would like to be a donor.

Q: Who cannot be an organ donor?

A: People with certain medical conditions cannot donate an organ. This includes people with:

- HIV
- Actively spreading brain cancer
- Certain severe, current infections

In some cases, if you have another disease or chronic medical condition, you can still donate your organs.



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Q: Will my religion allow me to donate my organs?

A: Talk with a leader in your church, synagogue, or religious organization before making a decision about whether to donate your organs. You may be interested to know that most religions support organ and tissue donation as a charitable act of love and giving.

Q: What organs and tissues can I donate?

A: Organs of the body that can be transplanted include:

- Kidney
- Heart
- Liver
- Lung
- Pancreas
- Intestines

People who are living can donate a kidney or part of the:

- Lung
- Liver
- Intestine
- Pancreas

Tissues that can be donated include:

- Cornea (coating of the eyeball)
- Middle ear
- Skin
- Heart valves
- Bone
- Veins
- Cartilage
- Tendons
- Ligaments

Stem cells, blood, and blood platelets can also be donated.

Q: Who pays for the cost of organ donation?

A: The transplant recipient's health insurance policy, Medicare, or Medicaid usually covers the cost of a transplant. The donor's family neither pays for, nor receives payment for, organ and tissue donation.

Some people who get transplants have a hard time affording the cost of the transplant or related expenses, such as travel and lodging. There are many local, regional, and national organizations that provide help through grants or services. To learn more about financial issues that transplant candidates and recipients face, as well as available resources, go to <http://www.transplantliving.org>.

Q: If I am a donor, will that affect the quality of my medical care?

A: No. Many people think that if they agree to donate their organs, the doctor or the emergency room staff won't work as hard to save their life. This is not true.

The transplant team is completely separate from the medical staff working to save your life. The transplant team does not become involved with you until doctors have determined that all possible efforts to save your life have failed.

Q: Does organ donation disfigure your body?

A: No. Donation does not change the appearance of the body. Organs are removed surgically in a routine operation. It does not interfere with having a funeral, including open casket services.



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Q: Can I be an organ or tissue donor and also donate my body to medical science?

A: No. You can donate your whole body to medical science. But, you can't donate your whole body and be an organ or tissue donor. If you wish to donate your whole body, you should contact the facility of your choice to make arrangements. Medical schools, research facilities, and other agencies need to study bodies to gain greater understanding of diseases in humans. This research is vital to saving and improving lives.

Q: Can non-resident aliens donate and receive organs?

A: Non-resident aliens can both donate and receive organs in the United States. Also, people from other countries can travel to the United States to receive transplants.

Q: Why should minorities be concerned about organ donation?

A: The need for transplants is high among minorities, particularly African-Americans.

1. Some diseases of the kidney, heart, lung, pancreas, and liver that can lead to organ failure are found more often in minority women.
2. The rate of organ donation from minority women does not keep pace with the number needing transplants.
3. The organ donor and recipient need to be genetically similar. In most cases, people are more similar to people of their own race than to people of other races.

4. Minority women may have to wait longer for matched organs. This may mean they are sicker at the time of transplant or die waiting. With more donated organs from this group, finding a match will be quicker, the waiting time will be cut, and more lives will be saved.

Q: Who manages the distribution of organs?

A: The United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) maintains the Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (OPTN). Through the UNOS Computer System, organ donors are matched to waiting recipients 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Q: What is the process for receiving an organ for transplantation?

- A:**
1. If you need an organ transplant, your doctor will help you get on the national waiting list.
 2. To get on the list, you need to visit a transplant hospital. Every transplant hospital in the United States is a member of OPTN. You can use the directory at www.unos.org/members/search.asp to find a transplant hospital.
 3. Transplant doctors will examine you and decide if you meet the criteria to be put on the list. You can get on the waiting list at more than one transplant hospital. Each hospital has its own criteria for listing patients. If you meet their criteria, they will add you to the list.
 4. Your name will become part of a pool of names. When a donor organ becomes available, all the patients in



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the pool are compared to the donor. Factors considered to decide who gets the organ include:

- Blood and tissue type
- Size of the organ
- Medical urgency of the patient's illness
- Time already spent on the waiting list
- Distance between donor and recipient

The organ is offered first to the candidate who is the best match. The organ is distributed locally first. If no match is found, the organ is offered regionally and then nationally until a recipient is found. The hardest part of this process is waiting. There is no way to know how long you will wait to receive a donor organ.

Q: What can I expect after an organ transplant?

A: After you receive an organ transplant, you should get to know your pharmacist and take steps to stay healthy.

Most people who have a transplant need to take a lot of medications. You may need to take some medicines several times a day while others are only taken on certain days. The doctors who did your transplant may have to change your medications or adjust the dosages every few days or weeks. It's important to find a good pharmacist who can help you understand your medications and manage your medication schedule. He or she can help explain how the medicine works, what the side effects may be, and how to keep track of your medications.

Your doctors will continue to monitor your health for many years after surgery. You will have a lot of lab tests, and you should try to understand the purposes of the tests to make sure the results are accurate. You will also take medication that stops your body from rejecting the transplanted organ, called immunosuppressants (IHM-yuh-noh-suh-PRESS-uhnts). This may make you more likely to get infections, and it may be harder for you to recover from some infections and illnesses.

Healthy lifestyle options are good choices for organ recipients as they are for everyone. Your transplant center can help you develop a plan for healthy eating and appropriate physical activity.

Q: Can I contact the family of the person whose organ I received?

A: Sometimes organ recipients want to thank the family of the donor. Sometimes donor families want to check on the health and well-being of the organ recipient. But, transplant centers are required by law to protect the confidentiality of donors and recipients. However, they can arrange for contact between families when both sides agree. Usually, the process begins with a letter from the recipient to the donor family sent in care of the transplant center. Guidelines vary by center. To learn more about the process, visit <http://www.transplantliving.org/community/publications/newfactsheets.aspx?fact=contact>. ■



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For more information

For more information about organ donation and transplantation, call womenshealth.gov at 1-800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network, HRSA, HHS

Internet Address: <http://optn.transplant.hrsa.gov>

Toll free: 1-888-ASK-HRSA (275-4772)

TTY/TTD: 1-877-4TY-HRSA (489-4772)

OrganDonor.Gov, HRSA, HHS

Internet Address: <http://www.organdonor.gov>

Toll free: 1-888-ASK-HRSA (275-4772)

TTY/TTD: 1-877-4TY-HRSA (489-4772)

National Living Donor Assistance Center

Phone Number(s): 703-414-1600

Internet Address: <http://www.livingdonorassistance.org>

United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS)

Phone Number(s): 888-894-6361

Internet Address: <http://www.unos.org>

Donate Life America

Phone number(s): 804-782-4920

Internet Address: <http://www.donatelife.net>

Children's Organ Transplant Association

Phone Number(s): 800-366-COTA (2682)

Internet Address: <http://www.cota.org>

This FAQ was reviewed by:

Sarah Taranto

SAS Analyst

United Network for Organ Sharing Research Department

Richmond, VA

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Content last updated February 17, 2010.