



womenshealth.gov

1-800-994-9662

TDD: 1-888-220-5446

Organ Donation and Transplantation



Q: What is organ donation and transplantation?

A: Organs or tissues from one person (the donor) are put into another person's body (the recipient). People of all ages and backgrounds should consider themselves likely donors.

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 3,700 transplant candidates are added to the national waiting list each month. Each day, about 77 people receive organ transplants. However, 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 92,000 people on the waiting list. 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 donate. Newborns as well as senior citizens have been organ donors. If you are under age 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 www.organdonor.gov/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. Even if you sign a donor card and/or state your intent on your driver's license, 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 health care provider, lawyer, and your religious leader that you would like to be a donor.

Q: What organs and tissues can I donate?

- A:**
- Kidney
 - Heart
 - Liver
 - Lung
 - Pancreas
 - Intestines
 - Cornea
 - Skin
 - Bone
 - Bone marrow



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Q: Does the donor's family have to pay for the cost of organ donation?

A: No. The donor's family neither pays for, nor receives payment for organ and tissue donation. The transplant recipient's health insurance policy, Medicare, or Medicaid usually covers the cost of transplant.

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.

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

A: No. Total body donation is an option, but not if you choose to be an organ or tissue donor. If you wish to donate your entire body, you should contact the facility of your choice to make arrange-

ments. 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.

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 frequently in minority women.
2. The rate of organ donation from minority women does not keep pace with the number needing transplants. Although minority women donate, in part, to their share of the population, their need for transplants is greater.
3. Matching donor organs to likely recipients requires genetic similarity. 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 and therefore may be sicker at the time of transplant or die waiting. With more donated organs from this group, finding a match will be quicker and the waiting time will be cut, and more lives will be saved.



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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 Organ Center, 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 UNOS. You can use the UNOS directory at www.unos.org/members/search.asp to find a transplant hospital.
3. A doctor will examine you and decide if you meet the criteria to be put on the list. You also 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. The hardest part of this process is waiting. There is no way to know how long you will wait to receive a donor organ.
5. Your name will be added to a pool of names. When an organ donor becomes available, all the patients in the pool are compared to that donor. Factors such as blood and tissue type, size of the organ, medical urgency of the patient's illness, time already spent on the waiting list, and distance between donor and recipient are considered.

The organ is offered first to the candidate who is the best match. The organ is distributed locally first, and if no match is found, it is offered regionally and then nationally until a recipient is found. ■



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For more information...

For more information on organ donation and transplantation, call the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) at 1-800-994-9662 or contact the following organizations:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Secretary's Organ Donation Initiative
Internet Address: www.organdonor.gov

Office of Minority Health, Office of the Secretary
Phone Number(s): (800) 444-6472
Internet Address: www.omhrc.gov

United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS)
Phone Number(s): (888) 894-6361
Internet Address: www.unos.org

Children's Organ Transplant Association
Phone Number(s): (800) 366-COTA (2682)
Internet Address: www.cota.org

Coalition on Donation
Phone number(s): (804) 782-4920
Internet Address: www.donatelife.net

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