

# Organ Donation



*“The Spirit of God has made me: the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” Job 33:4*

The first successful organ transplant occurred in 1954 with a kidney from one identical twin to another. This was the beginning of an amazing medical breakthrough that has since saved countless lives. Today, thousands of people have been saved by receiving an organ donation, but there are almost 100,000 people on the waiting list.

One fourth of all donations come from people who are still living, and the rest come from people who have experienced brain death. Brain death happens when the brain stops receiving oxygen, and can no longer function on its own. When there is no chance for recovery, a potential donor can be put on a ventilator, which allows oxygen to reach all organs of the body. This keeps the organs “alive” and working until the donation is complete. At that time, life support is removed, and all functions cease on their own. This may sound like a slippery slope, where organ happy doctors and nurses may not work hard on a person near death so they can take that patient’s organs. But contrary to tabloids and horror novels, nothing could be further from the truth. A patient in need of treatment is always the medical professional’s first priority. Only when there is no hope for recovery does the question of organ donation come into the equation. Even then, nothing can be done without the consent of the patient and/or his family.

At this time, organs that can be donated include the heart, kidney, liver, pancreas, intestines, and tissues that can be given include bones, bone marrow, skin and corneas. It is not unusual these days to transplant more than one organ at a time, such as a combined heart and lung transplant. A single organ and tissue donor can help as many as 50 people! It may surprise you to know that organs can be taken from all ages, because it is the condition of the organ itself that is critical, not the age of the person giving it. Children need organs, too, and they must be the right size. Most people will qualify to donate at least some parts of their bodies, except for anyone with HIV/AIDS, active cancer, or overwhelming infections. While organs must be transplanted within hours of their removal, tissues can be stored and

used later as needed. Examples of tissues are: corneas to restore sight, the middle ear to bring back hearing, and skin for burn victims. Heart valves, bone, veins, cartilage, and ligaments are also of great use. Stem cells and blood can be given by living donors, because the body will regenerate these vital materials. The most amazing fact involves the liver—when a part of it is donated, the liver actually grows back to its original size in only a few weeks!

Most religions encourage organ donation as an act of giving, and some simply leave it up to the person’s conscience. Ease any doubts you may have about becoming an organ donor by speaking with your religious leaders.

There are many myths about organ donation that might keep potential donors from filling out their organ/tissue donor card. There is **no** charge to the family when organs are harvested; the recipient pays all the costs. Rich and famous people do not receive priority for transplants, they simply get more publicity. A donor can still have an open casket—just as after an autopsy, the body maintains its shape for a regular viewing.

The best way to become an organ donor after your death is to discuss your views with your family beforehand. Filling out an organ donor card and signing the donation sticker on the back of your drivers license is an excellent start. However, these documents are not always available at the time a decision must be made, and are not **legally** binding. Your closest family member **MUST** give consent before any donation can take place. Look into your heart, discuss questions and concerns with your doctor, and **talk** to your family about what you want to do. While we all hope to live a long life, there are no guarantees. Your donation could give life, or sight, or hearing to another human being. What greater gift could you give?

Wonderful information can be found at:

[www.donatelife.net/](http://www.donatelife.net/)  
[www.organdonor.gov](http://www.organdonor.gov)