



National Kidney
Foundation™

The Organ and Tissue Donor Program





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

Maybe. Many 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.

Aren't organ and tissue transplants experimental?

No. Medical advances now make it possible to replace many organs and tissues. **Thousands of successful organ and tissue transplants take place each year.** Kidney and corneal transplants are the most common, but new drugs and improved techniques are increasing the numbers of heart, liver, pancreas, lung, small intestine, bone marrow and other types of transplants. Organ and tissue donation is truly a gift of life—it can be your gift of life.

How are organs and tissues for transplantation obtained?

Organs can be donated by individuals at the time of death (deceased donors) or by living donors. Tissues are from deceased donors.

Living donation is most common in the case of kidney or bone marrow transplantation. Living donations are also possible for liver, pancreas and lung transplants. 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, see *Answering Your Questions About Living Donation*, available from the National Kidney Foundation, or by visiting www.livingdonors.org.

How are donated organs 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. To help coordinate the process of matching and distributing organs, the national computer registry at UNOS is linked to regional organ banks around the country.

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.

Who can become an organ and tissue donor?

If you are 18 years of age or older, you may become a donor by signing a Donor Card or the organ donor declaration on your driver's license. If you are under 18, you may become a donor if your parent or legal guardian gives consent. There is no upper age limit on donation—even people in their 80s may be acceptable donors.



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 on your Donor Card, driver's license or state donor registry.

Will the quality of treatment be altered if a person has signed a donor card or is a declared organ donor?

Absolutely not. Organ 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 patients who die. 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 is so even if the patient had indicated a desire to be a donor, had signed a Donor Card or the organ donor declaration on his or her driver's license or had signed up at a state donor registry. Individuals who have made a donation decision should inform family members as they would about advance directives or other end-of-life decisions. In some states, if the individual has signed a Donor Card or other legal document certifying that donation is his or her choice, family permission is not requested.

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

No. The donor's family and the donor hospital are not responsible for any recovery expenses. The cost 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?

Here's all you have to do:

- Simply **sign the Donor Card** on the back of this brochure. Under state law it is a legal document through which you can express your wishes about donating organs and tissues.
- Discuss your decision with your family members or other loved ones.
- **Carry the card** with you at all times.
- It's that easy!

You will note that your Donor Card offers several options. It allows you to donate:

- Any organs or parts
- Specific organs and tissues
- Your entire body for anatomical study.

Do I have to register with an agency?

Many states have donor registries which are similar to signing a Donor Card or indicating your donation wishes on a driver's license. For more information about registries in your state, visit www.shareyourlife.org and click on your state.

Do I have to mention organ and tissue donation in my will?

No. Donated organs and tissues must be removed soon after death has occurred and this will be long before your will is read.



Can I still be an organ and tissue donor if I have a living will?

Yes. You may want to speak to your attorney about having a special provision in your living will indicating that ventilators may be used to the extent needed to preserve your organs until the donation can be made. You should also make sure your family and your doctor know that you want to have every measure taken in order to permit your organs to be used for donation.

Can I be sure that my gift will be used?

Every effort is made to use donated organs and tissues. Tissues such as bone, heart valves and skin can be preserved for a long time. Donated tissue can help tissue recipients many months or years after the donation itself.

What does the future hold?

As medical scientists continue to identify better techniques for matching and preserving organs and tissues and for preventing rejection, **all types of transplants will become more and more successful.** The demand for donors will keep increasing. For this reason, it is important for all Americans to consider organ and tissue donation and discuss this with their families.

Scientists are also studying the possibility of using organs and tissues from animals such as pigs for certain transplants. This is called xenotransplantation, and if it proves successful, it may help to ease the shortages of organs and tissues available for transplants in the future.

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 your National Kidney Foundation affiliate. They will be pleased to provide you with more information and additional Donor Cards.

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. The Uniform Anatomical Gift Act (UAGA) gives you the legal right to sign a Donor Card specifying your wishes to donate various organs and tissues upon your death.
- If you decide to be a donor, **complete and sign the Donor Card provided in this brochure**. Have it witnessed by your family members or friends. If you are under 18 years of age, you must have the consent of a parent or legal guardian.
- To determine if your state has a donor registry, visit www.shareyourlife.org and click on your state.

- Tell others about your decision, especially your family members and your physician.
- Carry your Donor Card with you at all times.
- Pass along this brochure to your friends.

Organ donation...the gift of life.

More than 20 million Americans—one in nine adults—have chronic kidney disease, and most don't even know it. More than 20 million others are at increased risk. The National Kidney Foundation, a major voluntary health organization, seeks to prevent kidney and urinary tract diseases, improve the health and well-being of individuals and families affected by these diseases and increase the availability of all organs for transplantation. Through its 47 affiliates nationwide, the foundation conducts programs in research, professional education, patient and community services, public education and organ donation. The work of the National Kidney Foundation is funded by public donations.

NATIONAL KIDNEY FOUNDATION

Please keep this card in a safe place and inform your family of your wishes to be a donor.

This is to inform you that, should the occasion ever arise, I would like to be an organ and tissue donor. Please see that my wishes are carried out by informing the attending medical personnel that I have indicated my wishes to become a donor.

Thank you.

SIGNATURE

DATE

**For further information, contact:
NATIONAL KIDNEY FOUNDATION
800.622.9010 • www.kidney.org**

ORGAN AND TISSUE DONOR CARD

Of _____
(print or type name of donor)

In the hope that I may help others, I hereby make this anatomical gift, if medically acceptable, to take effect upon my death. The words and marks below indicate my wishes.

I give: ■ any needed organs or tissues
 ■ only the following organs or tissues

(specify the organ(s), tissue(s))

for the purposes of transplantation, therapy, medical research or education;

 ■ my body for anatomical study if needed.

Limitations or special wishes, if any: _____



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www.kidney.org

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This is a legal document under the Anatomical Gift Act or similar laws. ■ Yes, I have discussed my wishes with my family. For further information consult your physician or

Witness

Witness

Date Signed

City and State

Signature of Donor

Date of Birth of Donor

Signed by the donor and the following two witnesses in the presence of each other:

THIS IS YOUR
DONOR CARD
from the
NATIONAL KIDNEY FOUNDATION

Here's all you have to do...

1. Designate your wishes by filling out the card, and sign it in front of two witnesses.
2. Discuss your wishes with your family and give them the top half of the card.
3. Carry the bottom half of the card in your wallet.
4. Tell someone else about organ and tissue donation.

DONATE LIFE