

Questions and Answers on Organ and Tissue Donation

Why should I register as an organ and tissue donor?

There are people in your community who are waiting for a life-saving organ transplant and you have the power to help them. More than 2,600 of our neighbors in the Upper Midwest are waiting for a transplant and the situation nationally is even more desperate, with over 100,000 people waiting for a transplant and nearly 18 people dying each day for lack of an organ.

How do I register to be an organ and tissue donor?

You can register to be a donor by checking the box on your driver's license or ID card application. People in Minnesota and North Dakota can also register online, and South Dakotans can register by mail. Links to online information for each state can be found on LifeSource's website at www.OrganDonation.org.

What does it mean to register as a donor?

Registering as an organ and tissue donor provides hope and life to the men, women and children waiting on the list for a transplant. It also means you could help save lives by agreeing to donate your organs, tissues and eyes at the time of your death. Please remember to tell your family that you want to be a donor so that they will be prepared to support your decision.

What if I haven't registered as a donor?

If you haven't documented a decision about donation and have the opportunity to save lives through donation at the time of your death, LifeSource will ask your family to make a decision about donation on your behalf. Therefore, it is extremely important that you discuss your wishes with your family.

What can be donated?

Organs: Heart, lungs, kidneys, pancreas, liver and intestines.

Tissue: Corneas, skin, veins, tendons, bone, heart valves and connective tissue.

What are the benefits of organ and tissue donation?

Families who make the decision to extend the gift of life often find that donation helps them in their grieving process. Donation is something positive that can come from the death of a loved one. One person can save or enhance up to 60 lives through organ and tissue donation.

Should my age or health condition influence my decision to become an organ and tissue donor?

Almost everyone can save lives through donation! Age and health criteria are evaluated on an individual basis at the time of death. Most health conditions do not exclude you from being a donor, and people of all ages - from just a few days old to well into their 90's - have given the gift of life through donation.

Will my body look different if I donate my organs and tissues?

Donation is a surgical procedure. As in any other medical procedure, the body is treated with great respect and dignity.

Will my family have to pay for the cost of my organ and/or tissue donation?

There is no cost to the donor family for donation. All expenses related to organ and tissue donation are paid by LifeSource and passed on to the transplant recipients and their health insurers.

Does my religion support organ and tissue donation?

All major religions support organ and tissue donation as one of the highest forms of loving, giving and caring – the principles upon which all religions are based.

If I am a donor, will I be able to have a regular, open-casket funeral service?

Donation does not prevent an open-casket funeral service.

If I am registered as a donor and I am admitted to a hospital, will they let me die so they can recover my organs?

Absolutely not. The first responsibility of medical professionals is to save lives, and every effort will be made to save your life before donation is even considered. Organ and tissue donation is an option only after all life-saving measures have failed.

Can organs and tissues be recovered prior to death?

No. Organs can only be recovered after death has been declared.

How are organs distributed to patients waiting for organ transplants?

Every person waiting for an organ transplant is registered with UNOS, the United Network for Organ Sharing. LifeSource works with UNOS to fairly allocate organs based upon medical urgency, genetic matching and length of time waiting.

Is there a “black market” for organs in the United States?

It is illegal to buy or sell human organs and tissues in the United States (Anatomical Gift Act of 1968). In addition, every organ and tissue donation and transplant is reviewed by a national governing body. Strict regulations prevent any type of "black market" from existing in the United States.

Can the rich and famous jump the list based on their celebrity status?

No. After a patient has been determined to be a medically-suitable candidate for an organ transplant, their name is added to the national computer waiting list managed by UNOS. Organs are fairly allocated based on medical criteria, genetic matching, and length of time on the waiting list.

Will the identity of the organ donor be revealed to the transplant recipient?

The identities of both the recipient and the donor family are confidential. LifeSource sends a letter to the donor family informing them about the organ recipients such as their age and gender, and how their health has improved. Some donor families and recipients correspond anonymously. On occasion, when both sides wish to correspond directly or meet, LifeSource will help facilitate the communication or meeting.

Why should minorities be especially concerned?

Some diseases of the kidney, heart, lung, pancreas and liver are found more frequently in racial and ethnic minority populations. Transplantation between people who are strong genetic matches is generally more successful. Recipients have a better chance of finding a match from their same racial group. Approximately 50 percent of all people on the waiting list are minorities while only 25 percent of all donors are minorities.