

## Frequently Asked Questions about Organ Donation And Transplantation

### What is organ donation and transplantation?

Organs or tissues from one human being (the donor) are put into another person's body (the recipient).

### What is the current status of organ donation and transplantation in the United States?

In recent years, the science of organ transplantation has made great strides. Unfortunately, the process of securing and allocating organs has not matched this progress. There still is a critical shortage of organs. Here are some statistics:

- The number of people waiting to receive an organ transplant in the United States is rising. There are now more than 82,000 people on the national organ transplantation waiting list.
- Each day, 63 people receive an organ transplant, but another 16 people on the waiting list die because organs aren't available.
- As of August 2003, in the United States there are over
  - 55,00 people waiting for a kidney transplant
  - 17,000 people waiting for a liver transplant
  - 3,000 people waiting for a heart and lung transplant
- Experts suggest that each of us could save or help as many as 50 people by being an organ donor.

### Who can be an organ donor?

If you are 18 years or older, you can show you want to be an organ donor by signing a donor card or telling your family members. If you are under age 18, you must have a parent's or guardian's consent. There are no age limits on who can donate.

### What organs and tissues can I donate?

- Kidney
- Heart
- Liver
- Lung

- Pancreas
- Intestine
- Cornea
- Skin
- Bone
- Bone marrow

## **How do I become a donor candidate?**

- State your intent to be an organ donor on your driver's license.
- Fill out a donor card and carry it in your wallet. You can download and print an organ donor card at [www.organdonor.gov/newdonorcard.pdf](http://www.organdonor.gov/newdonorcard.pdf).
- Tell your family and loved ones that you want to be a donor after you die.
- You may also want to tell your family health care provider, lawyer, and your religious leader that you would like to be a donor.

## **Does the donor's family have to pay for the cost of organ donation?**

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

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

No. A transplant team does not become involved with the patient until doctors have determined that all possible efforts to save the patient's life have failed.

## **Does organ donation disfigure your body?**

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.

## **Who manages the distribution of organs?**

The United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) maintains the national 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.

## **What is the process for receiving an organ for transplantation?**

1. If you need an organ transplant, your health care provider will help you get on the national waiting list.
2. To get on the waiting list, you need to visit a transplant hospital.
3. A doctor will evaluate 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. You wait. 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 type, 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 organs are distributed locally first, and if no match is found, they are offered regionally and then nationally until a recipient is found.

## **How can someone find a transplant hospital?**

Every transplant hospital in the U.S. is a member of UNOS. You can use the UNOS member directory at [www.unos.org/members/search.asp](http://www.unos.org/members/search.asp) to find a transplant hospital, organ procurement organization, or histocompatibility (tissue) lab.

## **How are minority women affected by organ transplants?**

Minority women suffer more from diseases like diabetes, kidney disease, and high blood pressure—diseases that can lead to organ failure. Finding organ donors can be challenging for minority women. Members of different racial and ethnic groups are usually more genetically similar and more likely to find organ donors within their own ethnic groups. For example, the most likely match for a kidney transplant is between a donor and patient of similar ancestry. Therefore, more donations by minority women increase the likelihood that a good match can be found.

# The National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC)

A Project of the Office on Women's Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

## For more information...

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

### **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary's Organ Donation Initiative**

Internet Address: [www.organdonor.gov](http://www.organdonor.gov)

### **Office of Minority Health, Office of the Secretary**

Phone Number(s): (800) 444-6472

Internet Address: [www.omhrc.gov](http://www.omhrc.gov)

### **American Heart Association**

Phone Number(s): (800) 793-2665

Internet Address: [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)

### **American Kidney Fund**

Phone Number(s): (800) 638-8299

Internet Address: [www.akfinc.org](http://www.akfinc.org)

### **American Liver Foundation**

Phone Number(s): (800) 465-4837

Internet Address: [www.liverfoundation.org](http://www.liverfoundation.org)

### **American Lung Association**

Phone Number(s): (800) 586-4872

Internet Address: [www.lungusa.org](http://www.lungusa.org)

### **American Medical Association**

Phone Number(s): (312) 464-5000

Internet Address: [www.ama-assn.org](http://www.ama-assn.org)

### **American Organ Transplant Association**

Phone Number(s): (281) 261-AOTA

Internet Address: [www.a-o-t-a.org](http://www.a-o-t-a.org)

### **Children's Organ Transplant Association**

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

Internet Address: [www.cota.org](http://www.cota.org)

### **Coalition on Donation**

Phone Number(s): (888) 355-SHARE

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

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## **National Marrow Donor Program**

Phone Number(s): (800) 627-7692

Internet Address: [www.marrow.org](http://www.marrow.org)

## **National Minority Organ Tissue Transplant Education Program**

Phone Number(s): (202) 865-4888

Internet Address: [www.nationalmottep.org](http://www.nationalmottep.org)

## **United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS)**

Phone Number(s): (804) 330-8500

Internet Address: [www.unos.org](http://www.unos.org)

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