

Information about organ or body donation after death

What is organ donation?

Organ donation is the gift of an organ to help someone who is desperately ill and needs a transplant. It is sometimes possible to use organs and body tissues from someone who has died to help others to live.

At the moment, kidneys, heart, liver, lungs, pancreas and the small bowel can all be transplanted, with the hope that other body parts may soon be able to be transplanted as techniques improve. Tissue such as corneas, skin, bone, cartilage, tendons and heart valves can also be donated.



Becoming an Organ Donor

There are many ways to register to join the NHS Organ Donor Register. You can:

- fill in an online form [here](#)
- call the NHS Donor Line on 0300 123 23 23
- text SAVE to 62323
- join when registering for a driving licence
- join when applying for a Boots Advantage Card
- join when registering at a GP surgery
- join when registering for a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC)

Restrictions on organ donation

Whether or not organs can be transplanted depends on how and where the person died. Only a very small number of people die in circumstances where they are able to donate their organs – less than 5,000 people each year in the UK.



The donation of internal organs (such as the liver, kidneys, heart or lungs) may be possible if the person died in hospital while on a ventilator, but not if they died at home or elsewhere. This is because organs have to be transplanted very soon after someone has died. Most people however can donate tissue, as unlike organs it may be possible to donate tissue up to 48 hours after a person has died.

The role of the coroner

If the cause of death is suspicious, sudden or unexpected and has been referred to the coroner, the coroner must agree to the removal of the organ, since the removal could affect some important evidence. Decisions can usually be made very quickly.

The role of your loved ones

If the person who died carried a donor card or was listed on the NHS Organ Donor Register and it is possible to transplant an organ, the appropriate qualifying person will be contacted to ask whether or not they agree to donation.

Where the person who died did not indicate their consent (or refusal) to donate their organs and, in the case of an adult, a nominated representative has not been appointed, someone close to them can give consent to the removal, storage and use of organs and tissues for transplantation. It is therefore very important that you discuss your wishes with your relatives, friends and loved ones.

The Human Tissue Act 2004 sets out the order in which those close to the deceased person should be contacted for the purposes of obtaining consent for the use of organs or body tissues. In order of priority this is:

- Partner
- Parent or child
- Brother or sister
- Grandparent or grandchild
- Niece or nephew
- Stepfather or stepmother
- Half brother or half sister
- Friend of long standing

For more information, visit the UK Organ Donation website at <http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk/>

Donating a body for medical education, training or research

Walter Craven Limited
Craven lodge
Broadgreen Road
Liverpool
L13 5SG

t: 0151 228 3900
f: 0151 252 1853
website craven-funerals.com



People who donate their bodies make a vital contribution to training by medical schools. Those who wish to donate their body must have made their wishes known in writing before they died, and let their next of kin know.

Bodies are not accepted for teaching purposes if organs have been donated or if there has been a post-mortem examination.

The Human Tissue Authority regulates this area, and if you need to know more about how to donate a body, visit www.hta.gov.uk

For more information about other issues concerning what to do following the death of a loved one, click [here](#) to read our article.

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