

The facts about organ and tissue donation

Why should I consider donation?

Over 1800 Australians are currently waiting for life saving organ transplants. 50 of those waiting are children. In Australia, more than 1 person will die every week waiting for their organ transplant. Transplantation gives recipients renewed or enhanced quality of life. Every donor has the potential to improve the lives of 10 people. There is a 10 times greater chance of needing a transplant than donating an organ.

Who can donate?

Anyone can donate organs and tissue. There is no age limit for becoming a donor. Each potential donor is medically assessed at the time of death to determine whether donation is possible. People should never assume they are too old or not healthy enough. In Australia last year, the oldest organ donor was over 80 years old.

Am I too unhealthy to donate organs and tissue?

Very few medical conditions automatically disqualify a person from donating organs or tissue. The only medical conditions that preclude a patient from becoming a donor are:

- HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus
- Current neoplastic disease other than primary brain tumours and non-malignant skin cancers
- Systemic viral infections/uncontrolled sepsis (e.g. measles, rabies, adenovirus, parvovirus and herpes encephalitis)

Am I too young to give my consent?

People aged 18 years and over can register their legally valid consent or objection on the Donor Register. Those aged 16 or 17 can still register their intention to donate. People under 18 years of age can become organ and tissue donors with the consent from the senior available next of kin at the time of death. There are many children on the transplant waiting list who need organs smaller than the ones adults can provide.

Who makes a decision about donation after I die?

Even if a potential donor has registered 'yes' with the Australian Organ Donor Register, the next of kin will be consulted in the donation process. Most family will carry out their loved one's decisions. Where a deceased's wishes are unknown, consent for organ and tissue donation rests with the senior available next of kin. It is important for potential donor's to discuss their wishes with their family so that if the situation ever arises, the decision to donate will be made easier for the family.

What can I donate?

Organs include kidneys, heart, lungs, liver and pancreas. Tissue includes corneas, heart valves, bone and skin. Potential donors can choose which organs and tissues they wish to donate on the **Australian Organ Donor Register**.

How can I donate?

Registering consent to organ and tissue donation is simple. The potential donor should discuss their decision with their family, partner and friends and sign onto the **Australian Organ Donor Register** – the only national register. If the potential donor has previously expressed an intention to donate, such as ticking a box on a driver's licence, it is important to update details and register consent. Registration forms are available at Medicare Offices, GP surgeries and online at www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/public/services/aodr/register.jsp.

What is the process of organ & tissue donation?

The way in which a person dies determines whether they are able to donate organs or tissue or both. In most cases, a person may only donate organs where they have been declared brain dead in an intensive care unit in hospital. Less than 1% of all people who die in hospital each year die in this way.

A far greater number of people have the opportunity to donate tissue for transplantation. Unlike organs, tissue may be stored for a period of time and tissue donation does not require the donor's death to have occurred in the same limited circumstances as organ donation for transplantation to be successful.

How will they know I am really dead?

People are sometimes concerned or confused about the difference between brain death and coma. Brain death is completely different to coma. Medical tests can clearly show the difference between coma and brain death. In a coma there remains some brain function and recovery may still be possible. In 'brain death' (the legal definition of death in Australia) there is irreversible loss of brain function and recovery is not possible. In order to donate organs and tissues, a person must first be declared dead according to strict criteria and specific testing procedures, which is outlined in legislation in each State.

Will my body be disfigured by the removal of organs and tissue?

The removal of organs and tissue is no different to any other surgical operation and is performed by highly skilled health professionals. The donor's body is always treated with dignity and respect. If an organ or tissue is not needed then it is not removed from the body.

The donation process does not alter the physical appearance of the body, nor does it affect funeral arrangements, including open-casket funerals.

How are organs allocated?

An organ is always given to the next most suitable person on the waiting list. Organs such as heart, lungs, liver and pancreas are matched to recipients by blood group, height, weight and body size. Organs are allocated to home state recipients first then offered on rotation interstate. Only organs which are matched for transplant are removed.

If I become a donor, will my organs and tissues be used for research?

The donor register is not for recording decisions about donating organs and tissue to scientific research purposes or for the manufacture of biological medical products. Separate and specific permission is required for research purposes.

Who can access information on the Australian Organ Donor Register?

Only authorised medical/healthcare personnel involved in the donation have access to the Australian Organ Donor Register and a person's consent status.

Is organ donation against my religion?

Organ donation is consistent with the beliefs of most religions. This includes Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam and Judaism. Potential donors are advised to speak to a member of their clergy if they are unsure about their faith's position.

To register consent for organ and tissue donation online or to download a registration form, follow this link to the Medicare Australia website: <http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/public/services/aodr/register.jsp>.

To register by phone call toll free 1800 777 203.