

Myths about Organ & Tissue Donation

Myth If I agree to donate my organs, my doctor or the emergency room staff won't work as hard to save my life. They'll remove my organs as soon as possible to save somebody else.

Reality When you go to the hospital for treatment, doctors focus on saving **your** life — not somebody else's. You'll be seen by a doctor whose specialty most closely matches your particular emergency. The doctor in charge of your care has nothing to do with transplantation.

Myth Organ donation is against my religion.

Reality Organ donation is consistent with the beliefs of most religions. This includes Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam and most branches of Judaism. If you're unsure of or uncomfortable with your faith's position on donation, ask a member of your clergy.

Myth I'm under age 18. I'm too young to make this decision.

Reality That's true, in a legal sense. But your parents can authorize this decision. You tell your parents your wish to donate, and your parents can give their consent knowing that it's what you wanted. Children, too, are in need of organ transplants, and they usually need organs smaller than those an adult can provide.

Myth I want my loved one to have an open-casket funeral. Can this happen if his/her organs or tissues have been donated.

Reality Organ and tissue donation doesn't interfere with having an open-casket funeral. The donor's body is clothed for burial, so there are no visible signs of organ or tissue donation. For eye donation, an artificial eye is inserted, the lids are closed, and no one can tell any difference. For bone donation, an artificial bone replaces removed bone. With skin donation, a very thin layer of skin similar to a sunburn peel is taken from the donor's back. Because the donor is clothed and lying on his or her back in the casket, no one will be able to see.

Myth I'm not in the greatest health, and my eyesight is poor. Nobody would want my organs or tissues.

Reality Very few medical conditions automatically disqualify you from donating organs. The decision to use an organ is based on strict medical criteria. It may turn out that certain organs are not suitable for transplantation, but other organs and tissues may be fine. Don't disqualify yourself prematurely. Only medical professionals at the time of your death can determine whether your organs are suitable for transplantation.

Myth Ticking the box on your licence ensures you will become an organ and tissue donor.

Reality Although in some states in Australia you can still tick a box on your licence, this process does not ensure you will become an organ and/or tissue donor. To ensure your wishes are carried out, it's important you talk to your family about your decision and register on the Australian Organ Donor Register. To join the register call 1 800 777 203, log onto www.medicareaustralia.gov.au or visit your local Medicare office.

Myth Family and next-of-kin will override your decision to donate your organ and tissue donation.

Reality Even if you have registered 'yes' with the Australian Organ Donor Register, your family or next-of-kin will be consulted in the organ and tissue donation process. It is rare for a donation not to go ahead because the family or next-of-kin do not agree with their loved one's decision. Most families or next-of-kin will carry out a loved one's wish if they know what it is. On the other hand, if they don't know your decision, their decision is made much harder, and it is possible donation will not go ahead. Talking to your partner, family and friends about donation is crucial.

Myth Maybe I won't really be dead when they sign my death certificate. It'll be too late for me if they've taken my organs for transplantation. I might have otherwise recovered.

Reality Although a very common myth, in reality, people never "recover" after they are declared brain dead. In fact, people who have agreed to organ donation are given more tests to determine that they are truly dead than are those who haven't agreed to organ donation. In Australia all organ and tissues are only removed from people who have been diagnosed clinically and legally dead. In order to donate organs and tissues, a person must first be declared dead according to strict criteria, which are outlined in legislation.