

# FAQs About Organ & Tissue Donation

Today a severe shortage of organs for transplantation exists in our country. Despite continuing efforts at public education, misconceptions and inaccuracies about donation persist. It is a tragedy if even one person decides against donation because they do not know the truth. Following is a list of the most common questions about donation and transplantation.

## **Q. What organs are people able to donate that can help others through transplantation and research?**

**A.** Organs which are transplantable are heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, pancreas and intestines.

## **Q. What tissues are people able to donate that can help others through transplantation and research?**

**A.** Tissues that can be donated include eyes, skin, bone, heart valves, blood vessels, tendons and nerves.

- **Eyes** - The cornea is used to help restore sight to people with cornea problems caused by eye disease, injury, or birth defects.
- **Skin** - Donated skin can be used for grafts for burn victims, abdominal wall repair, breast reconstruction after mastectomy, or rotator cuff repair. Skin donation also promotes healing and reduces scarring.
- **Bone** - Donated bone can be used in bone grafts which can make an enormous difference, restoring health and mobility to many patients. Such applications are spinal fusions, reconstruction related to trauma, tumors, disease and fractures, fill defects, it decreases pain, prevents amputation and collapse of bone.
- **Heart Valves** - Heart valves can be transplanted to save the lives of children born with heart defects and adults with damaged heart valves.
- **Blood Vessels** - Donated vessels can replace damaged arteries and veins to increase circulation.
- **Tendons** - Tendons attach bones and muscles to each other and donated tendons can be used to help rebuild damaged joints and increase circulation.
- **Nerves** - Restores feeling and touch after nerve damage.

## **Q. If emergency room doctors know you're an organ donor, will they work as hard to save you?**

**A.** If you are sick or injured and admitted to the hospital, the number one priority is to save your life. Organ and tissue recovery takes place only after all efforts to save your life have been exhausted and death has been legally declared. The medical team treating you is completely separate from the organ recovery team.

## **Q. Does certain history of medical illness mean your organs or tissues are unfit for donation?**

**A.** At the time of death, the appropriate medical professionals will review your medical and social history to determine whether you will be a candidate for donation. Each potential donor is evaluated on a case by case basis. With recent advances in transplantation, more people have the opportunity to become donors. LifeShare suggests that you do not rule yourself out as a potential donor due to illness, let the medical professionals determine if you are a suitable candidate.



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## **Q. When do you become too old to be a donor?**

**A.** People of all ages and medical histories will be considered as potential donors. Your medical condition at the time of death will determine which organs and tissues can be donated, not your age. LifeShare suggests that you do not rule yourself out as a potential donor due to age, let the medical professionals determine if you are a suitable candidate.

## **Q. Does my family have to pay for organ and tissue donation?**

**A.** No. The donor family is never billed for expenses related to donation. LifeShare Transplant Donor Services of Oklahoma pays for all procedures, tests or evaluations needed for the donation process. Funeral costs remain the responsibility of the family.

## **Q. Does organ and tissue donation disfigure the body or change the way it looks in the casket?**

**A.** LifeShare works closely with all state funeral homes to implement the best practices and techniques in donation with the hope of returning your loved one to you with minimal if any change to their appearance.

## **Q. Do celebrities and people with money get transplanted more quickly than those without?**

**A.** No. Matching organs to recipients is based strictly on medical criteria and has nothing to do with notoriety or wealth. The process for matching a recipient with a donor is dependent upon how sick an individual is and who is the best match for the organ.

## **Q. Do some religions prohibit donation?**

**A.** All major organized religions approve of organ and tissue donation and consider it an act of charity.

## **Q. Can your family override your wish to be a donor?**

**A.** Because of our state's First Person Consent law, it is not necessary to get permission from the family if a person has expressed his or her desire to be a donor in a "document of gift", such as a driver's license, state ID card or enrollment in Oklahoma's online donor registry, the LifeShare Donor Registry. We strongly believe that a person's wish to donate must be honored, if medically possible. Organ and tissue recovery coordinators will always talk to the family about the donation before it takes place. Oklahomans are urged to share their decision to be a donor with their families.

If you are under 18, you may declare your intent to be a donor in any document of gift, however, permission from a parent or guardian must be obtained before donation can actually take place.

## **Q. Does my registration grant consent for whole body donation?**

**A.** Registering as an organ and tissue donor does not grant permission for your whole body to be donated to a medical school or other whole body donation program. There are two organizations in Oklahoma that can facilitate whole body donation. The decision to donate your body to science must be set up before the time of death. Oklahoma State University and the University of Oklahoma do not allow organ donation prior to body donation.

## **Q. Where are you able to register to be an organ, eye and tissue donor?**

**A.** There are several different methods for an individual to register to be an organ, eye and tissue donor. When you visit a tag agency to get your driver's license or state ID card, you have the option to register. You can also sign-up online at [LifeShareRegistry.org](http://LifeShareRegistry.org) or can call **800-826-5433** for information to be sent via mail.