

Deceased Organ Donation



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Choosing to become an organ donor is a very personal decision. At the same time, it's important that you discuss your wishes with your family because they may be involved in the consent process in the event of your death.

There are two types of organ donation. Deceased donation takes place when organs become available for donation after someone has died. Living donation happens when someone voluntarily donates an organ or part of an organ to a person in need.

Why Organ Donation Is So Important

Organ donation saves lives and restores health. A kidney transplant is not a cure, but it offers the best possible improvement to health and quality of life for many people living with kidney failure. The only other life-sustaining treatment available is dialysis, which artificially cleans the blood.

The need for organs for transplantation is much greater than the available supply. Wait times can range from a few months to several years.



Kidney Transplants Are Highly Successful

A kidney transplant is a very successful and accepted treatment. The success rate for a transplant from a deceased donor is high: 85–90% of these kidneys are working well after one year and 74% of Canadians with a kidney transplant still have a functioning kidney after 10 years. Success rates are improving every year with advances in medical research.

How Does Deceased Donation Work?

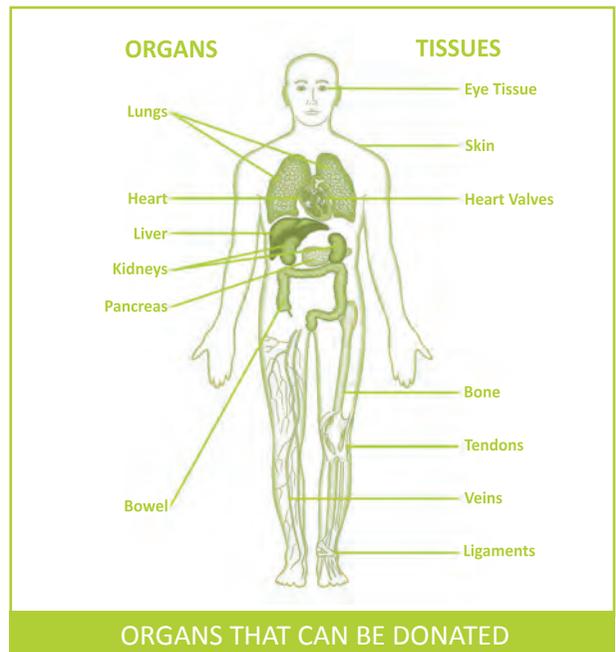
Before organ donation can take place, strict medical criteria must be met to determine whether brain death has occurred, or whether to proceed with the donation after cardiac death. *Deceased donors* may also be called *non-living donors* or *cadaveric donors*.

After the person dies, his or her organs will be assessed for suitability. Although anyone can indicate their wish to become an organ donor upon their death, only the organs of a small number of people can be used. This has to do with the health of the organs and the circumstances of the person's death.

When organ donation takes place, the donor's body is treated with respect and dignity. The body is not disfigured, so an open casket funeral is still possible for deceased donors.

Which Organs Can Be Donated?

The lungs, heart, liver, kidneys, pancreas, and bowel can be donated. Tissues may include eye tissue, heart valves, bone, tendons, veins, and ligaments. More than two dozen people can be helped by a single donor. As an organ donor, you can specify which organs and tissues you would like to donate.



How Are Organs Allocated?

Organ transplant programs have a matching system to make sure that the distribution of organs is based on fair criteria. These criteria may include the suitability of the match, the amount of time on the waiting list, and many other factors. Each transplant centre can provide the guidelines it uses.

Who Can Donate?

Anyone of any age can donate organs and tissues. It's the health of the donor that is most important.

How to Become an Organ Donor

If you're interested in being an organ donor, here are some steps you can take.

- 1. Learn:** Find out as much as you can about organ donation. Think about whether you want to donate all your organs or only specific ones.
- 2. Discuss:** Be sure to discuss your decision with your family so that they know your wishes. In the event of your death, they may be involved in the consent process.
- 3. Decide:** Only you can make the choice that's right for you. It must be a decision that both you and your family are comfortable with. You can change your mind at any time.
- 4. Act:** If you decide you want to donate your organs and/or tissues after your death you'll need to register your decision through a provincial donor registry, healthcare card, or driver's license. To find out which method applies in your province or territory, contact The Kidney Foundation office closest to you or visit www.kidney.ca.

A Guide for Family Discussion

A lot of people find it helpful to have a quiet family meeting to discuss their feelings and questions about organ donation. It can be a difficult subject to talk about because it involves our death, and the death of people we love.

Here are some guidelines to help you set up this meeting:

- Ask your family members to read this brochure and write down any questions they have so they can bring them to the meeting.
- Set aside a convenient time and place to have the discussion. Turn off the television, music, and your phones to make sure you all have the privacy and quiet you need.
- Give everyone a chance to talk about their feelings, thoughts, and questions.
- Take as much time as you need to make sure everyone can freely participate.

Here are some questions to help start the discussion:

- Why do you think donating your organs would be a good thing to do?
- Do you want to donate all your organs? Why or why not? Would you like to have your body used for medical research?
- What worries, if any, do you have about organ donation?
- Are there any other issues about your death you want to discuss?
- Do you all clearly understand everyone's personal wishes, including your own?
- You can change your mind and your instructions to your family at any time.

FAQs

Q. If I've indicated that I want to be an organ donor, will everything be done to save my life?

A. Yes. The main concern for medical personnel caring for critically ill patients is to do everything possible to save their lives. Organ donation is considered only when all lifesaving efforts have failed.

Q. Will my family know who received my organs after my death?

A. In Canada, there is a law to protect the anonymity of the donor and recipient. However, many transplant programs will forward non-identifiable letters of thanks or cards from the transplant recipient to the donor's family, and vice versa.

Q. Are there any religious considerations to organ donation?

A. Many religious groups endorse organ donation and/or respect a person's right to make their own decision. If you have questions about your own religious or spiritual practice, speak with your religious or spiritual leader.

Q. Can a person sell their organs for money in Canada?

A. No. Organ donation is a gift. It's illegal to buy or sell organs in Canada.

Our Commitment

The Kidney Foundation is working with representatives from healthcare, industry and, government to increase organ donation rates. We encourage Canadians to make a positive decision regarding organ donation and to discuss their wishes with their family.

Where to Go for More Information

Contact your local Kidney Foundation office or organ donation agency, or speak to your family doctor.



OUR VISION

The Kidney Foundation of Canada is committed to achieving excellent kidney health, optimal quality of life, and a cure for kidney disease.

OUR MISSION

The Kidney Foundation of Canada is the national volunteer organization committed to eliminating the burden of kidney disease through:

- Funding and stimulating innovative research for better treatments and a cure;
- Providing education and support to prevent kidney disease in those at risk and empower those with kidney disease to optimize their health status;
- Advocating for improved access to high quality healthcare;
- Increasing public awareness and commitment to advancing kidney health and organ donation.

For further information, or to help us in our efforts, please contact The Kidney Foundation office in your area. You can also visit our website at kidney.ca.

The Kidney Foundation would like to acknowledge and thank the members of the Kidney Foundation's National Programs & Public Policy committee for their contributions and professional expertise in the development of this resource.

This material is available in accessible formats upon request by contacting info@kidney.ca or calling 1-800-361-7494.