



FACTS

Organ Donation Saves Lives



No matter how old you are and what your health is, you may be able to help someone following death, by donating organs and tissue.

- **Approximately 1800 people in Australia are waiting for organ transplantation**
- You are 10 times more likely to need a transplant than to ever become a donor.
- **Every 2 and a half days someone dies waiting for a transplant in Australia.**
- People who can't donate blood have saved & improved many lives by donating organs and tissue.
- **Australian transplantation techniques and survival rates are amongst worlds best.**
- Increasing transplantation rates provides enormous economic and social benefits.

When can organ and tissue donation happen?

When death occurs usually the **heart stops** pumping, the blood carrying oxygen is unable flow to the brain, and without oxygen, the brain dies and death is declared. (This is known as **cardiac death**- where the heart dies before the brain). **Tissue donation** (corneas, heart valves, bone, skin and tendons) is possible up to 12 to 24 hours after death in these circumstances. (**About 1 in 2 deaths**). **Very, very rarely** if the death is expected and expertise is available, organ donation (kidneys, liver, lungs, pancreas) is possible up to 10 minutes after death. This is known as organ **Donation after Cardiac Death**- DCD. (**Less than 1 death in every 500 deaths**).

The usual circumstances of death where organ donation (heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, pancreas, and intestine) can be considered (**brain death**- where the brain dies before the heart) is **very rare**. (**Less than 1 death in every 100 deaths**). In this situation there has been a tremendous effort to save the life of a person who has suffered an extreme brain injury. Critical care teams use technology to keep the heart beating and blood and oxygen circulating around the body in an effort to save the persons life. Because of their efforts to save the persons life, the organs continue to function. Tragically and **despite all the efforts** of a critical care team **to save the life** of a person in this situation, **occasionally** because the brain becomes so swollen, blood and oxygen is unable to pump into the brain, which means the brain cells die. There are clear signs that the person is not in a coma and has died. Death is declared independently by two doctors using an extensive process while the person is still attached to machines. No one declared dead this way has ever recovered. **Tragically the person has died. Treatment must be stopped.**

The family are given the opportunity to consider donation after the decision to stop treatment has been made and death has been confirmed. In the ACT the **Australian Organ Donor Register** is accessed at this time. Families will usually say **Yes** to donation **if they know their loved ones wishes**. A specialist nurse (donor coordinator) is responsible for ensuring that the person who has died and their family are supported and given information, so that all involved can make a decision which best respects their loved one and their family. The coordinator will ensure that the deceased person is respected and cared for. The coordinator is present in the operating theatre at the time of surgery. **The body is treated with great respect and not 'mutilated'**. The nursing and medical staff feel privileged to be involved in honouring the deceased wish to save lives. Some families wish to have a viewing after surgery and the coordinator will arrange this. The coordinator ensures the family are provided with information about the recipients and additional support.

One of the saddest moments experienced when talking to the family of someone who has died, is to find that the family don't know what their loved one would want. In these circumstances families will often say 'No'. Many are unaware of how **rare** it is for someone who has died to have the **opportunity to save lives** in this way. **If every family asked said 'yes', the waiting list would almost disappear and many lives would be saved and improved.** Ensure you have factual information to make your decision about organ and tissue donation, and share it with your family and friends.

The worlds major religions support organ donation

Pope John Paul II stated:

"It is the decision to offer without reward, a part of one's body for the health and wellbeing of another person. We rejoice that medicine, in its service of life, has found in organ and tissue transplantation, a new way of serving the human family."

The drivers' licence is NOT enough.....

The Australian Organ Donor Register is the best way to say that you want to save lives.

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