

Organ donation and religious beliefs



**A guide to organ donation
and Christian beliefs**

Organ donation

Organ donation

Organ donation is the gift of an organ to help someone who needs a transplant. Thousands of people's lives across the UK are saved or improved each year by organ transplants. But every day across the UK someone dies waiting for an organ transplant.

Organs that can be donated by people who have died include the heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, pancreas and small bowel. Tissue such as skin, bone, heart valves and corneas can also be used to help others. Living donation of a single kidney or part of a liver is also possible.

Why is it important to think about donating organs?

With medical advances it is now possible to use transplanted organs and tissues to enhance the life chances of those suffering from a range of terminal conditions such as kidney, liver and heart failure. More people than before now suffer from these conditions and some ethnic

groups seem to be more affected than others.

The person in need of an organ today may be a stranger, but tomorrow that person could be someone you know and love. So please take the time to decide whether you want to be an organ donor, record that decision on the NHS Organ Donor Register, then tell your family.

Family involvement

Families play an important role in organ donation in all areas of the UK, regardless of whether an opt in or opt out system is in place.

If you die in circumstances where you could be an organ donor, a specialist organ donation nurse would check the NHS Organ Donor Register to see if you had registered your decision, and speak to your next of kin to discuss whether you wanted to be a donor. The voice of your family is critical to what happens. So, whatever your decision, it's important they know what you want. This will make it easier for them to honour your decision.

When can organ donation take place?

Doctors and other healthcare staff are committed to doing everything possible to save a patient's life. Organ donation is only considered once all attempts to save life have failed and after death has been confirmed by doctors who are entirely independent of the transplant team.

Most donated organs in the UK come from people who die from a severe brain injury, and who are on a ventilator in an intensive care unit. The brain injury will have damaged the vital centres in the brain stem which are essential for life. Doctors call this confirmation of death using neurological criteria, also known as 'brain stem death'. This is not the same as being in a coma or 'vegetative state'. Tests are carried out by two senior doctors, who are independent of the transplant team, on two different occasions, following strict national guidance.

When death is confirmed using neurological criteria, the patient will still be on a ventilator (a machine that pushes air into the lungs and supports the circulation of blood around the body). This prevents the organs from losing the oxygen-rich blood supply, which is necessary for a healthier transplant outcome.

Organs can also be donated from people, who, with their family's agreement, are having life-sustaining intensive care treatment withdrawn. If the heart stops and circulation ceases soon after, death will be confirmed and donation can occur. This is known as 'donation after circulatory death'.

Care and respect

The removal of organs and tissues is carried out with the greatest care and respect. The family can see the body afterwards and staff can contact a chaplain or local religious leader if the family wishes.



HOLY
BIBLE

***"In eternity we will neither have nor need our earthly bodies:
former things will pass away, all things will be made new."***

Revelation 21:4,5

Christianity and organ donation

The Christian faith is based upon the revelation of God in the life of Jesus Christ. Christians believe Jesus taught people to love one another, and to embrace the needs of others. Organ donation can be considered by Christians as a genuine act of love.

We can choose to donate our organs to save the lives of many people:

“God has given us the wisdom to make scientific discoveries. Science has given us the ability to lengthen life. To see someone’s life change through a transplant – this is an amazing gift to give.”

Bishop Rose of Dover

“Preparing for death should not be feared. It is important to make a well-informed decision with regards to donating your organs after death, and to discuss this with your family and loved ones so that they are aware of your decision and can honour it. This may help to start a conversation so that you too are able to make an informed choice about loved ones when the time comes.”

Bishop Paul Mason, Lead Catholic Bishop for Healthcare and Mental Health

“Identifying specific faith groups and their beliefs and practice around organ donation provides a basis for discussion. We then need to share information on what faith groups believe in order to foster better understanding of cultural norms. Disseminating more widely information on the cultural risk factors for kidney disease keeps people informed, assists in breaking barriers and engendering hope as people make better health choices which will positively impact their life.”

Sharon Platt-McDonald, Director for Health, Women’s Ministries and Community Outreach for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the UK and Ireland

“The Methodist Church has consistently supported organ donation and transplantation in appropriate circumstances, as a means through which healing and health may be made possible.”

Methodist Church UK

“Organ donation means, for those who receive it, the gift of life itself. I can think of nothing more generous, and I commend the process of registering as an organ donor as a positive and deliberate way of ensuring that as many as possible receive this most generous of all gifts.”

The Most Revd John Davies, Archbishop of Wales & Bishop of Swansea and Brecon

Christians believe in eternal life and that preparing for death should not be a source of fear. Nothing that happens to the body, before or after death, can impact on a Christian’s relationship with God.

Making your choice

How do I become a donor?

If you want to donate some or all of your organs or tissue after your death, the best way to ensure your family know what you want and honour your decision is to register as a donor on the NHS Organ Donor Register and to tell your family what you have decided. You can also record on the register whether your faith/belief is important and should be considered as part of the donation discussion.

What if I don't want to donate?

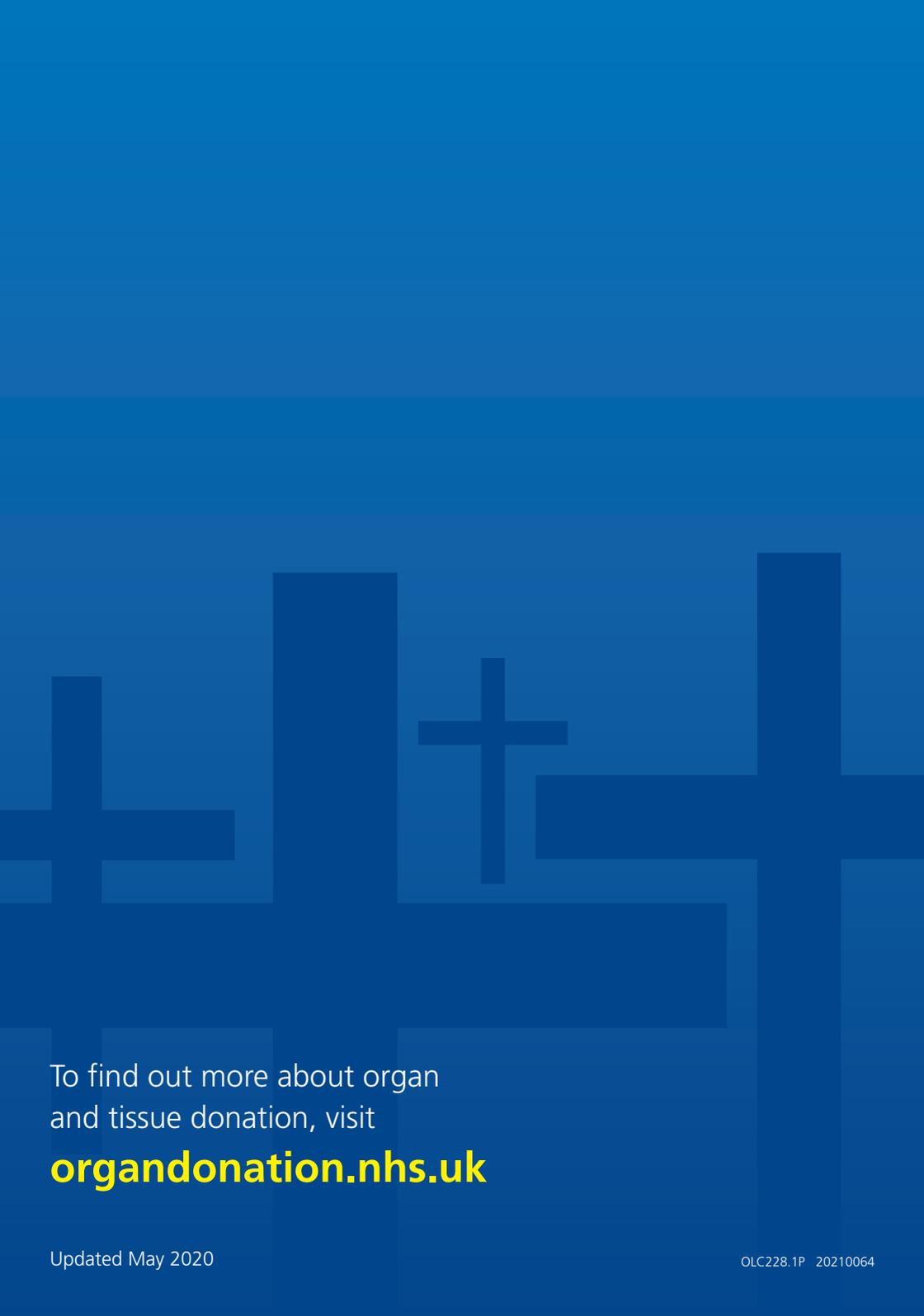
If you don't want to donate, it is important to register this decision on the NHS Organ Donor Register and to tell your family.

Don't 'opt out' of donation if you are happy to donate some organs or tissue but not others. Instead, register as an organ donor and select the organs or tissue you would like to donate.

What if I want to nominate someone to make the donation decision?

There is a form available to download from organdonation.nhs.uk which enables you to nominate someone else to make the donation decision for you. You will need to complete the form and send it back. Please note that whether or not you can legally nominate a representative to make the decision for you depends on where you live in the UK.

To find out more and to register your decision, whatever it is, visit organdonation.nhs.uk or call **0300 123 23 23**.



To find out more about organ
and tissue donation, visit
organdonation.nhs.uk