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 cornes can also be used to help others. Living donation of a single kidney or part of the liver is also possible.

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 Organ Donor Register about whether your faith/belief is important to you 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 the decision on the NHS Organ Donor Register and to tell your family.

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

There is a form available to download from www.organdonation.nhs.uk which enables you to nominate someone else to make the donation decision. 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
In principle Judaism sanctions and encourages organ donation in order to save lives - that is for the purpose of 'pikuach nefesh'. This principle can override Jewish objections to deceased organ donation, such as the requirements (i) to avoid unnecessary interference with the body after death; (ii) not to derive benefit from the dead body; (iii) not to have any further interference with the body after death; (iv) not to derive benefit from the dead body; (v) not to have any further interference with the body after death. These objections can override Jewish objections to deceased organ donation, such as the requirements (i) to avoid unnecessary interference with the body after death; (ii) not to derive benefit from the dead body; (iii) not to have any further interference with the body after death; (iv) not to derive benefit from the dead body; (v) not to have any further interference with the body after death.

Judaism and organ donation

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The family of the deceased play a key role in the process. The family may have concerns about the deceased donor's organs being used and may wish to discuss the matter with a Rabbi or other religious authority. Where a person has made a donation decision while they were still alive, the family should be consulted. The aim of this discussion is to help the family to decide whether or not to agree to organ donation within the context of their faith and culture as well as in the context of healthcare. In Judaism it is widely recognised that families are entitled to think through this decision, and to make it after they have had such advice. Expertise in Jewish law, alongside accurate information about what has happened to the potential donor, should help to resolve some of the questions that families may have. Judaism holds that organ donation may not be initiated until death has definitely occurred. For some Jews 'brain stem death' is unacceptably late, for others donation can only take place after 'circulatory death'. Some families may have difficulty in identifying the respected religious adviser from whom they should make inquiries. Most Rabbis will be evident from their community affiliation. If there is uncertainty then the main synagogue bodies that provide supportive information are the United Synagogue, the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, the Federation of Synagogues, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogues, the Masorti Synagogues, Reform Judaism, and Liberal Judaism.

Care and respect

Once a decision is made in favour of deceased organ donation, the removal of organs is carried out with care and respect for the body. Until the body is taken to an operating theatre for the organ donation, the family should remain with it, and if they so wish then a chaplain, a local Rabbi or lay leader, or their religious adviser can be with them.

After donation has taken place it is important that 'k'vod hamet' applies. In Judaism any further interference with the body must be avoided. There should be respect for the body to the burial society so that rapid burial can take place – this is a prime concern for the family.

Key points:

• Judaism approaches the question of deceased organ donation in an individual case-by-case basis.
• The family of the deceased play a key role in the process.
• They often require support not only about understanding the medical issues but also about how organ donation can be done in a way that is consistent with their faith and cultural traditions.
• At a time of stress and grief consultation with Rabbis and religious authorities can provide support and assistance.
• The Jewish principles of 'pikuach nefesh' and 'k'vod hamet' need to be respected.
• During and after the donation process Judaism incorporates a number of principles which could not be neglected – that of 'nichum aveilim' - giving comfort to the bereaved.