

# Organ and tissue donation FAQs



Questions on organ and tissue donation may come up throughout your lesson so we have included some frequently asked questions below for you to have at hand while teaching.

Please also see the accompanying in-depth information document for more detail on organ donation – plus tissue, blood and bone marrow donation for context – and visit our website: [organdonation.nhs.uk](https://organdonation.nhs.uk)

### 1. What is donation?

Donation is giving a solid organ or tissue such as skin or tendons to help someone who needs it. Transplants can save or greatly enhance the lives of other people, but this relies on donors and their families supporting their decision to donate their organs or tissues when they die.

### 2. Why donate?

Through the altruism of donors, NHS Blood and Transplant is able to save and transform thousands of lives every year. However, there are still not enough organ and tissue donors.

This is because the number of people who die each year in circumstances where it is medically possible to donate is very small (around 5,500) and also because the consent rate (the percentage of families who, when asked, support their loved one's decision to donate their organs and tissues) has remained broadly static.

As a result there are around 6,500 people currently on the active transplant waiting list.

### 3. What organ and tissues can I donate?

- Kidneys
- Heart
- Liver
- Lungs
- Pancreas
- Small bowel
- Tissues, including corneas, heart valves, skin and bone.



#### 4. How does a transplant happen?

NHS Blood and Transplant manages the National Transplant Database, which includes details of all patients who are waiting for or who have received a transplant, and the NHS Organ Donor Register (ODR) – a confidential list of people who want to donate their organs and/or tissue.

We match and allocate donated organs in a fair and unbiased way and arrange transport to get the donated organ to the patient.

#### 5. Will doctors work hard to save my life if I agree to donate my organs and/or tissue?

Yes, doctors always focus on saving lives. Health professionals have a duty of care to try to save life first. If despite all their efforts a patient dies, their wish to be an organ and tissue donor may then be fulfilled.

#### 6. Will they make sure I'm dead before they remove my organs?

People can only become donors after doctors pronounce their death. This is the same for all deaths regardless of being a donor or not. Strict guidance is followed in all cases.

#### 7. Where are organ donors cared for?

Organ donors are usually cared for in a critical care environment such as an intensive care unit. Most organ donors are people who become ill quite suddenly or have had a bad accident and are on life support through machines and equipment. Therefore, the number of organ donors is quite small, compared to the number of deaths each year.

Tissue donors don't necessarily have to die in a critical care environment and may be able to donate tissue wherever they die.

#### 8. Is organ donation against my religion?

All major religions in the UK support the principles of organ and tissue donation. This includes:

- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism
- Sikhism

You can find more information at [organdonation.nhs.uk/about-donation/what-does-my-religion-say](https://organdonation.nhs.uk/about-donation/what-does-my-religion-say). If someone is unsure of or uncomfortable with their faith's position on donation, they can ask their religious leader.



## **9. Can people under 18 donate their organs?**

Yes. Children and young people regularly become donors, saving numerous lives every year. Students should have the conversation with their parents if they are thinking about donating their organs after their death. Parents can give consent if they know that it's what their child wanted. Age is also no barrier to joining the NHS Organ Donor Register.

## **10. Will donation leave my body disfigured?**

All organs and tissues are removed with great care and respect in an operating room. Specialist healthcare professionals will make sure you are treated with dignity and any surgical incision is covered. In the case of eye donation, small caps are placed under the eye lids so there are no signs of donation post retrieval. In occasional circumstances, there can be slight bruising depending on what treatment the donor had before death.

## **11. Which parts of the eye can be donated?**

The cornea and sclera can both be used to restore vision. The cornea is the clear tissue at the front of your eye that lets in light so you can see. It has six layers. The sclera, or white of your eye, can be used to help rebuild damaged eyes.

## **12. How long after death can eyes be donated?**

You may be surprised to learn that eyes can be donated up to 24 hours after a person dies, and unlike organ donation you don't have to die in a hospital intensive care unit or A&E department to become a donor.

## **13. Can older people donate their organs and/or tissue?**

There's no age limit for donating. Healthcare professionals decide to use your organs and/or tissue based on strict medical criteria, not age, and will determine whether your organs and tissues are suitable for transplantation when you die.

## **14. Can I donate my organs or tissue if I have a medical condition?**

Very few medical conditions automatically disqualify you from donating. Medical professionals decide to use your organs and/or tissue based on strict criteria. Certain organs and/or tissue may not be suitable for transplantation, but others may be fine. The doctor at the hospital will determine whether your organs and tissues are suitable for transplantation when you die.



### 15. I've heard that people can buy and sell organs. Is that true?

This is not true. The transplant laws in the UK forbid the selling of human organs or tissue.

### 16. How do I become a donor?

You can choose which organs you would want to donate when joining the NHS Organ Donor Register. This is a confidential list of people who want to donate their organs and tissue to help save or transform lives.

You can join by:

- Visiting our website: [organdonation.nhs.uk](https://organdonation.nhs.uk)
- Calling us on **0300 123 23 23**.

It is very important to let your loved ones know if you want to be an organ and tissue donor, as your relatives are more likely to agree to donation going ahead if they know it's what you wanted to happen. If you die in circumstances where you can donate your organs or tissue, your family will be approached about donation. They will be asked to support your decision to donate if you were on the NHS Organ Donor Register or asked to make a decision on your behalf if you haven't registered, so it's important to tell them you want to be a donor and that you want them to support this.

On the NHS Organ Donor Register you can also:

- Register not to be an organ and tissue donor: You can choose not to donate your organs or tissue in the event of your death
- Update your registration: Whether you move homes, change your name or change your mind about donating your organs and/or tissue you can always update your registration with your new details and decision
- Withdraw from the register: You can choose to withdraw your details and decision from the register.

The law in Wales has changed to bring in a soft 'opt-out' system for organ and tissue donation. If you live in Wales and have not registered a decision on organ donation on the NHS Organ Donor Register, told family or appointed a representative; you will be treated as having no objection to being an organ donor. This is called 'deemed consent'.

