

# Organ Donation

Share life by donating your organs and tissues

**O**rgan transplantation can be lifesaving for people with organ failure. According to the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS), there were more than 76 000 people waiting for organ transplants in the United States as of June 2001. Thousands of those patients may die because there are not enough donated organs to meet the demand. The main factor limiting organ donation is that less than half of the families of potential donors consent to donation.

An article in the July 4, 2001, issue of JAMA reports on the factors that influence families' decisions to donate the organs of a family member. The authors found that families who had discussed organ donation in the past and who had prior knowledge of the patient's wishes were much more likely to donate the patient's organs.

## WHAT IS DONATED?

Many organs can be donated, including heart, intestines, kidneys, liver, lungs, and pancreas. Tissues that can be donated include corneas, heart valves, and skin. Donations may be used in people who have organ failure, who are blind, or who have severe burns or serious diseases. If you wish, you may specify which organs and tissues you would like to donate.

## STEPS TO TAKE TO ENSURE DONATION

- Inform your family, friends, and physician that you wish to be a donor
- Fill out a donor card and the back of your driver's license and keep copies with your physician, family, and attorney, and in your wallet and the glove compartment of your car
- Assign a health care proxy or a medical power of attorney, a document that indicates whom you trust to make medical decisions for you. This can be a physician, a friend, or a family member
- Prepare and sign a living will and an advance care directive—legal documents that state your wishes in the event you become incapable of communicating

## SOME FACTS ABOUT BEING A DONOR

- Documenting that you are a donor will not affect your treatment in an emergency; the first emphasis is always to attempt to save your life
- Recipients of your organs are chosen by severity of illness, time spent on a waiting list, and medical factors, not by economic or celebrity status
- There are no age limits for donors
- There is never a charge to your family if you are an organ donor
- Most religions support organ donation
- Your body will *not* be disfigured (for funeral services)

Follow the steps above to be sure your wishes are followed. If you are not currently registered to be an organ and tissue donor, consider giving the gift of life to someone who needs it.

Sources: United Network for Organ Sharing, Coalition on Donation, American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine, National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, Health Resources and Services Administration/Department of Health and Human Services

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Type of Transplant	No. of Patients Waiting for Transplant
Kidney	49252
Liver	17789
Pancreas	1132
Pancreas Islet Cell	202
Kidney-Pancreas	2528
Intestine	162
Heart	4247
Heart-Lung	218
Lung	3736
<b>Total*</b>	<b>76848</b>

Source: UNOS, national patient waiting list data as of June 8, 2001.

\*Some patients are waiting for more than one organ and may have registered with more than one transplant center (multiple listing); therefore, the total number of registrations is greater than the actual number of patients.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS)  
888/894-6361  
[www.unos.org](http://www.unos.org)
- Coalition on Donation  
800/355-SHARE  
[www.shareyourlife.org](http://www.shareyourlife.org)
- Health Resources and Services Administration/Department of Health and Human Services  
301/443-7577  
[www.organdonor.gov](http://www.organdonor.gov)
- Transplant Recipients International Organization, Inc  
800/TRIO-386  
[www.trioweb.org](http://www.trioweb.org)

## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). A JAMA Patient Page on organ donation was published on October 7, 1998.

