

Opinion

Organ Donation Saves Lives - Know Your Options

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Introduction

Due to a lack of available organs, 3 people die each day while waiting for a transplant. If you're considering being an organ donor, here's what you need to know [1].

Can Anyone Donate Their Organs?

Anyone can join the organ donation register. But only a small percentage will end up donating their organs. In fact, only around 5,000 people each year will end up being organ donors. The way you die can have an impact on your ability to donate your organs. The condition of your organs will also be a factor, but it's something that you cannot know in advance. Even if you have many health problems, one or two organs may be suitable for donation after your death.

Only if you have active Cancer, Ebola, CJD or are HIV positive will you be completely unsuitable. In fact, even with some types of cancer, you may have some suitable organs. If you want to be a donor, it is best not to assume that your organs will be unsuitable. It's better that you're registered as a donor, to allow the professionals to make their judgement [2-4].

In order for a donation to take place, the donor and recipient must be matched using a national database. This database compares everything from height and weight to blood type, to increase the chance of success. Some potential recipients will wait just days for their new organ. Others will wait years, with many dying whilst sitting on a waiting list. Many stars need to align to match a suitable donor and recipient (**Figure 1**).

Is the Donor Register Opt-In?

Currently, you must opt in to the organ donor register. This means that you need to make an active decision to register as an

organ donor. The law is changing, thanks to Max and Keira's Bill [5], named after 9-year-old Keira Ball and the recipient of her heart, Max Johnson. From spring 2020, England will have an opt-out system. Instead of stating that you want to be an organ donor, you'll have to state that you don't want to. Research has shown that 80% of people in the UK agree with organ donation. But with only 38% taking steps to join the register, many potential recipients are missing out.

In almost all cases, your family will have the final say. This means that even if you're a registered donor and appear on the database, your family may be able to stop your organs from being donated. It's very important to let your friends and family know how you feel about donating your organs, in the hope that they'll respect your wishes.

Which Organs Can Be Donated?

You can donate your heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, small bowel and your kidneys. You can also donate your corneas-and in fact, this may be an option even with active cancer elsewhere. Many types of tissue can also be donated including skin, bone, tendons, eyes, heart valves and arteries. One donor can save the lives of up to 8 people, as well as improving the lives of many others (**Figure 2**).

Can I Only Donate Once I'm Dead?

A living donor is someone that donates an organ to someone they know or a stranger, whilst they're still alive. Obviously we need most of our organs, and very few can be donated as a living donor. But, if you want, you can donate a kidney or donate part of your liver [6].

Most people have two functioning kidneys, yet only need one to survive. For someone that has no working kidneys, this donation can be life-changing.



Figure 1 Instrument for Organ Donation.



Figure 2 One donor can save the lives.



Figure 3 The geographical distance between the donor and recipient by using Database.

Can I Choose Who My Organs Will Go To?

In England, you agree to a Non-Directed Deceased Donation. This means that you can't choose who your organs will go to after you die. Instead, your organs will be matched to recipients using the national database.

Matching through the database ensures that organs are sent to the recipients that need them most, and will benefit most from them. This database also considers things like the geographical distance between the donor and recipient, so that the organ is still useful on arrival (**Figure 3**).

Organ donation can feel like a very big decision, but most are in support of it. You are always free to refuse to be an organ donor. For very good reasons, a majority of the big organ

donation decisions are left in the hands of the professionals and a sophisticated database that matches donors to recipients. But the biggest decision of all, the choice to become a life-saver, is one that you get to make on your own.

References

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