

Surgeon explains the myths surrounding organ donation

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Over 100,000 people in the U.S. are waiting for an organ transplant. Unfortunately, many may never get the call saying that a suitable donor organ—and a second chance at life—has been found. It's estimated that more than 15 people die every day in the U.S. because of the lack of donor organs.

It can be hard to think about what's going to happen to your body after you die, let alone donating your organs and tissue. But being an [organ donor](#) is a generous, worthwhile decision that can be lifesaving.

If you've never considered organ donation or delayed becoming a donor because of something you've heard, here are answers to some common organ donation myths and concerns.

Myth: If I agree to donate my organs, the hospital staff won't work as hard to save my life.

Fact: When you go to the hospital for treatment, [health care professionals](#) focus on saving your life—not somebody else's. You'll receive care from health care professionals whose expertise most closely matches your condition and who can give you the best care possible.

Myth: Maybe I won't really be dead when they sign my [death certificate](#).

Fact: Although it's a popular topic in the tabloids, in reality, people don't start to wiggle their toes after they're declared dead. People who have agreed to organ donation are given more tests to determine that they're truly dead than those who haven't agreed to organ donation. These extra tests are done at no charge to their families.

Myth: Organ donation is against my religion.

Fact: Organ donation is consistent with the beliefs of most major religions. These religions include Roman Catholicism, Islam, most branches of Judaism and most Protestant faiths. If you're unsure of or uncomfortable with your faith's position on organ donation, ask your clergy member.

Myth: I'm under 18. I'm too young to make this decision.

Fact: Many states allow people younger than 18 to register as organ donors, but the final decision will remain the responsibility of your parents or legal guardian. Discuss your wish to become an organ donor with your family, and ask for their consent. Keep in mind that children need organ transplants, and they usually need organs smaller than those an adult can provide.

Myth: An open-casket funeral isn't an option for people who have donated organs or tissues.

Fact: Organ and tissue donation doesn't interfere with having an open-casket funeral. The donor's body is clothed for burial and treated with care and respect, and there are no visible signs of organ or tissue donation.

Myth: I'm too old to donate. Nobody would want my organs.

Fact: There's no defined cutoff age for donating organs. The decision to use your organs is based on strict medical criteria, not age. Don't prematurely disqualify yourself. Let the doctors decide at the time of your death whether your organs and tissues are suitable for transplantation.

Myth: I'm not in the best of health. Nobody would want my organs or tissues.

Fact: Few medical conditions automatically disqualify you from donating organs. Again, the decision to use an organ is based on strict medical criteria. It may turn out that certain organs aren't able to be transplanted, but other organs and tissues may be fine. Don't prematurely disqualify yourself. Only medical professionals at the time of your death can determine whether your organs can be transplanted.

Myth: I'd like to donate one of my kidneys now, but I wouldn't be allowed to do that unless one of my family members is in need.

Fact: While that used to be the case, it isn't any longer. Whether it's a distant family member, friend or stranger you want to help, you can donate a kidney through certain transplant centers as what is known as a living donor.

If you decide to become a living donor, you will undergo extensive questioning to ensure that you know the risks and that your decision to donate isn't based on [financial gain](#). You also will undergo testing to determine if your kidneys are in good shape and whether you can live a healthy life with just one kidney.

Myth: Rich and famous people go to the top of the list when they need a donor organ.

Fact: The rich and famous aren't given priority when it comes to allocating organs. It may seem that way because of the amount of publicity generated when a celebrity receives a transplant, but they are treated no differently than anyone else. In reality, celebrity and financial status are not considered in organ allocation.

Myth: My family will be charged if I donate my organs.

Fact: The organ donor's family is never charged for donation. The family is charged for the costs of all final efforts to save your life, and those are sometimes misinterpreted as costs related to organ donation. Costs for organ recovery go to the transplant recipient.

Becoming an organ donor is easy. You can indicate that you want to be a donor in these ways:

- Register with your state's donor registry. Most states have registries. Check the list at organdonor.gov.
- Designate your choice on your driver's license. Do this when you obtain or renew your license.
- Tell your family. Make sure your family knows your wishes regarding donation.

The best way to ensure that your wishes are carried out is to register with your state's organ donation registry and include donor designation on your driver's license or state ID. Taking these steps legally authorizes your [organ donation](#) upon death.

If you have designated someone to make health care decisions for you if you become unable to do so, make sure that person knows that you want to be an organ donor. You also may include your wishes in your living will if you have one, but that paperwork might not be immediately available at the time of your death.

It's also important to tell your family you want to be a donor. Hospitals seek consent from the next of kin before removing organs, although this isn't required if you're registered with your state's donor registry or have donor designation on your driver's license or state ID card.

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