

Organ donation is a great gift but more donors are needed

Everyone can make a difference.
Please talk to your family and register your
wishes on the NHS Organ Donor Register.

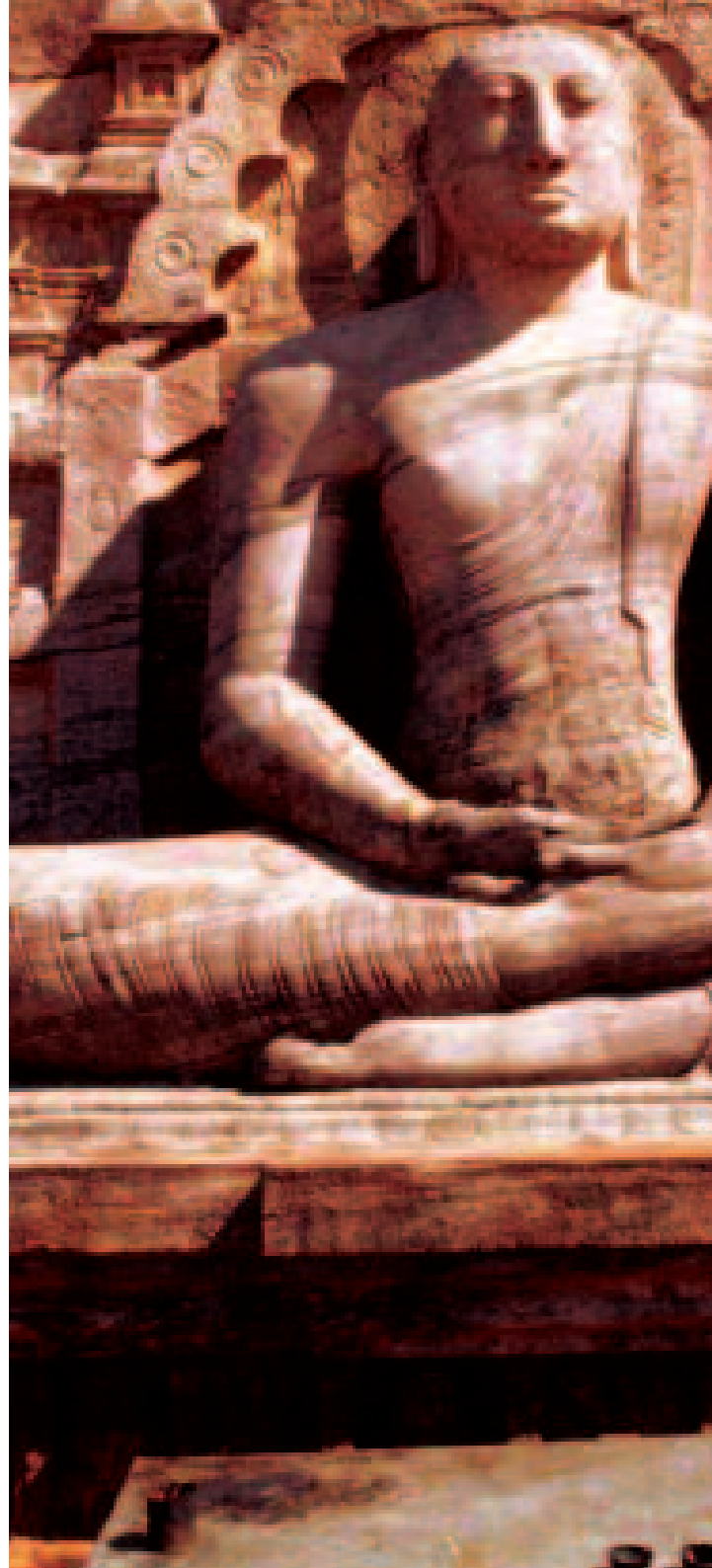
To find out more about organ donation, or to join
the NHS Organ Donor Register, contact:

The Organ Donor Line
0845 60 60 400
www.uktransplant.org.uk

Information on Buddhism is available from
www.bbc.co.uk/religion

The Buddhist Society
020 7976 6104
www.thebuddhistsociety.org

Transplants save lives



Buddhism and Organ Donation

A guide to organ donation
and Buddhist beliefs



Organ donation

Organ donation is the gift of an organ to help someone else who needs a transplant. Hundreds of people's lives are saved each year by organ transplants. 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 corneas can also be used to help others.

When can organ donation take place?

Doctors and nurses are committed to doing everything possible to save life. Organs are only removed for transplantation once all attempts to save life have failed and after death has been certified by a doctor or doctors who are entirely independent of the transplant team.

Most donated organs come from people who die from a severe brain injury and who receive treatment on a ventilator in an intensive care unit. The brain injury damages vital centres in the brain stem which are essential to maintain life. No one can live once these centres have been destroyed. Tests can show conclusively when this has happened.

In some circumstances, patients who die in hospital but are not on a ventilator may also donate. They are called non-heartbeating donors.

Sometimes people who do not die in hospital can become tissue donors.

Consent

The consent, or lack of objection, of those closest to the patient is always sought before organs can be donated. This is why it is so important for people to discuss their wishes with their loved ones. Donation is an individual choice and views differ even within the same religious groups. Many families who agree to organ donation have said that it helps to know some good has come from their loss.

Care and respect

The removal of organs is carried out with the greatest care and respect. The family can see the body afterwards and staff can contact a chaplain or local religious leader if the family wishes.

Buddhism and organ donation

There are no injunctions in Buddhism for or against organ donation.

The death process of an individual is viewed as a very important time that should be treated with the greatest care and respect. In some traditions, the moment of death is defined according to criteria which differ from those of modern Western medicine, and there are differing views as to the acceptability of organ transplantation. The needs and wishes of the dying person must not be compromised by the wish to save a life. Each decision will depend on individual circumstances.

Central to Buddhism is a wish to relieve suffering and there may be circumstances where organ donation may be seen as an act of generosity. Where it is truly the wish of the dying person, it would be seen in that light.

If there is doubt as to the teachings within the particular tradition to which a person belongs, expert guidance should be sought from a senior teacher within the tradition concerned.

When he discovered a monk sick and uncared for, the Buddha said to the other monks, “

Whoever would care for me, let him care for those who are sick”.

Mahavagga VIII.26.1-8 Kucchivikara-vatthu

The Monk with Dysentery. Translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.

