

What is the NHS Organ Donor Register?

Facing up to the death of a loved one is hard. Having to make a decision about organ donation, and being unsure what that person would have wanted, can cause extra distress.

The best way to make sure your family and friends never find themselves in this situation is to talk to them now.

No two people are alike even if they share a religion. So, please, talk to your family and register your wishes so they know what you would have wanted after your death.

The NHS Organ Donor Register is a nationwide confidential list of people who are willing to be donors if the time ever comes.

To find out more about organ donation and to join the NHS Organ Donor Register:

Call the Organ Donor Line:

0845 60 60 400

or visit

www.uktransplant.org.uk

See also our more detailed series of leaflets on organ donation and religious perspectives available on the website.

Produced by UK Transplant, Fox Den Road, Stoke Gifford, Bristol BS34 8RR
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34749/0/UKT



Organ donation and religious perspectives



Every year hundreds of people die while waiting for a transplant and many others lose their lives before they even get on to the transplant list.

There is a serious shortage of organs and the gap between the number of organs donated and the number of people waiting for a transplant is increasing.

Some people are not sure whether their religion would prevent them from agreeing to donate their organs after their death – yet all the major religions in the UK support the principles of organ donation and transplantation.

It is important that people from all backgrounds donate organs, as there is a much better success rate when transplants are carried out within the same ethnic group. Black and Asian people are three times as likely to need a kidney transplant than white people, so there is an even greater need for more black and Asian donors.

This leaflet has been written by the NHS with the support of religious leaders of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism.

What is 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 the generosity of organ donation. Organs that can be donated by people after death 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.

Doctors and nurses are committed to doing everything possible to save life and organs are only removed for transplantation once all attempts to save life have failed and the patient has died. Most donated organs come from people who die while on a ventilator in an intensive care unit, after having suffered a severe brain injury.

Organ donation and religion

All the major religions of the UK support the principles of organ donation and transplantation. However, within each religion there are different schools of thought, which means that views may differ. All the major religions accept that organ donation is an individual choice.

This leaflet offers a brief guide to religious viewpoints regarding organ donation. If you have any doubts, you should discuss them with your spiritual or religious leader.

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 *

Christianity and organ donation

The Christian faith is based upon the revelation of God in the life of Jesus Christ. Throughout his life Jesus taught people to love one another and he proved his love for the world upon the cross. It seems in keeping with this that Christians consider organ donation as a genuine act of love and a way of following Jesus' example. This act of love then becomes part of a Christian discipleship or faith journey that is motivated by compassion to help someone else and demonstrates a sense of social responsibility.

Sacrifice and helping others are consistent themes in Christianity, which teaches the principle of seeking for others what you hope others would do for you. Enabling life to be lived as fully as possible is consistent with the teaching of the Son of God, Jesus Christ: *“...freely you have received, freely give”*
Matthew, chapter 10:8

Christians should be encouraged to help others in need. Discussing organ donation with family and friends is a responsible and thoughtful act.

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

Hinduism and organ donation

There are many references that support the concept of organ donation in Hindu scriptures. *Daan* is the original word in Sanskrit for donation meaning selfless giving. In the list of the ten *Niyamas* (virtuous acts) *Daan* comes third.

Life after death is a strong belief of Hindus and is an ongoing process of rebirth. The law of karma decides which way the soul will go in the next life.

Organ donation is an integral part of the Hindu way of life, as guided by the *Vedas*. That which sustains is accepted and promoted as *Dharma* (righteous living). Scientific treatises form an important part of the *Vedas* – *Sage Charaka* deals with internal medicine while *Sage Sushruta* includes features of organ and limb transplants.

“...it is said that the soul is invisible...knowing this you should not grieve for the body.”
Bhagavad Gita, chapter 2:25

Islam and organ donation

In 1995 the Muslim Law (Shariah) Council UK issued a fatwa (religious opinion) on organ donation. The council resolved that:

- the council supports organ transplantation as a means of alleviating pain or saving life on the basis of the rules of the Shariah
- Muslims may carry donor cards
- the next of kin of a dead person, in the absence of a card or an expressed wish to donate their organs, may give permission to obtain organs from the body to save other people's lives.

The fatwa is based on the Islamic principle of *al-darurat tubih al-mahzurat* (necessities over-

rule prohibition). Normally, violating the human body, whether living or dead, is forbidden in Islam – but the Shariah believes this can be overruled when saving another person's life.

However there are also a significant number of Muslim scholars who believe that organ donation is not permissible and hold the view that this does not fall under the criteria of the Islamic principle of *al-darurat tubih al-mahzurat* (necessities overrule prohibition) due to other overriding Islamic principles.

Both viewpoints take their evidence from the *Qur'an* and the *Ahaadith* and therefore individual Muslims should make a decision according to their understanding of the Shariah or seek advice from their local Imam or scholar.

The Muslim Law Council UK fatwa draws on one of the basic aims of the Muslim faith: saving life.

"Whosoever saves the life of one person it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind."
Holy Qur'an, chapter 5:32

Judaism and organ donation

In principle, Judaism supports and encourages organ donation in order to save lives (*pikuach nefesh*).

This principle can sometimes override the strong objections to any unnecessary interference with the body after death, and the requirement for immediate burial of the complete body.

As all cases are different, Jewish law requires consultation with a competent Rabbinic authority before consent is granted.

For more information please contact the Office of the Chief Rabbi, or another competent Halachic authority.

"One who saves a single life – it is as if he has saved an entire world."

Pirke D'Rav Eliezer, chapter 48

Sikhism and organ donation

Sikh philosophy and teachings place great emphasis on the importance of giving and putting others before oneself.

It also stresses the importance of performing noble deeds and there are many examples of selfless giving and sacrifice in Sikh teachings by the ten Gurus and other Sikhs.

Sikhs believe life after death is a continuous cycle of rebirth but the physical body is not needed in this cycle – a person's soul is their real essence.

"The dead sustain their bond with the living through virtuous deed."

Guru Nanak, Guru Granth Sahib, p 143

Acknowledgements

UK Transplant would like to thank the following organisations for their help in researching and producing this leaflet:

The Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, The Bradford Interfaith Resource Centre, The Buddhist Society, The Church of England, College of Health Care Chaplains, Council of African & Afro-Caribbean Churches (UK), Hindu International Medical Mission, Hospital Chaplaincies Council, The Inter Faith Network for the UK, The Methodist, Baptist & Catholic Churches, Muslim College London, Muslim Law (Shariah) Council UK, National Council of Hindu Temples UK, The Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK), Network of Sikh Organisations UK, Office of the Chief Rabbi UK, University College London, World Council of Hindus.

