

# **Sikhism and Organ Donation**

A guide to organ donation  
and Sikh 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.

# Sikhism and organ donation

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

*“Where self exists, there is no God  
Where God exists, there is no self.”*

Guru Nanak, *Guru Granth Sahib*

The Sikh faith stresses the importance of performing noble deeds. 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 deeds.”*

Guru Nanak, *Guru Granth Sahib*

*“The Sikh religion teaches that life continues after death in the soul, and not the physical body. The last act of giving and helping others through organ donation is both consistent with, and in the spirit of, Sikh teachings.”*

Dr Indarjit Singh OBE, Director of the Network of Sikh Organisations UK  
Endorsed by Sikh Authorities in Amritsar, Punjab

*“The true servants of God are those who serve Him through helping others.”*

Guru Nanak, *Guru Granth Sahib*



*“In my family we all carry donor cards and would encourage all Sikhs to do so”*

Dr Indarjit Singh OBE, Director  
Network of Sikh Organisations UK

## Organ donation the gift of life

Today more than 10,000 people in the UK need an organ transplant which could save or dramatically improve their lives. Most are waiting for a kidney, others for a heart, lung or liver transplant.

Please join the NHS Organ Donor Register and tell family and friends about your wishes.

Join the NHS Organ Donor Register Online at:

**[www.organdonation.nhs.uk](http://www.organdonation.nhs.uk)**  
**by phoning 0300 123 23 23**  
**or text SAVE to 84118**

## Transplants save lives

Information on Sikhism is available from:  
[www.bbc.co.uk/religion](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion)

