

"I always carry my donor card with me"
Paul Seto, Director, The Buddhist Society

Organ donation is a great gift but more donors are needed

Everyone can make a difference
Please

- Talk to your family
- Register your wishes
- Carry a donor card

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.uk

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

Helping others is central to Buddhism along with the belief that charity forms an integral part of a spiritual way of life.

There are examples in Buddhist scripture of the compassion shown by Buddha in giving his life and body to help others. *The Sutra of Golden Light*, chapter 18, shows how Buddha gave his body to save a starving tigress and her cubs, who were later reborn as his disciples.

Human life, like everything else, is impermanent. It may be considered an act of compassion to enable another person to continue to live. For many Buddhists the most important consideration regarding death is the state of mind as this will influence the rebirth.

“Organ donation is an extremely positive action. As long as it is truly the wish of the dying person, it will not harm in any way the consciousness that is leaving the body. On the contrary, this final act of generosity accumulates good karma.”

Sogyal Rinpoche – *The Tibetan Book of Living & Dying*, published by Rider. Extract used with permission of the Random House Group Ltd

There are many different Buddhist traditions and organ donation is an individual choice:

“I would be happy if I was able to help someone else live after my own death.”

Dhammarati, Western Buddhist Order

“Non-attachment to the body can be seen in the context of non-attachment to self and Buddhist teachings on impermanence. Compassion is a pre-eminent quality. Giving one's body for the good of others is seen as a virtue.”

The Amida Trust

“Organ donation is acceptable in Theravada Buddhism. It is a Buddhist virtue to generously extend help to other sentient beings and this covers the case of organ donation.”

Phramaha Laow Panyasiri, Abbot, The Buddhavihara Temple

