

Organ donation is a great gift but more donors are needed

Everyone can make a difference

What you can do is:

- *make your willingness to be a donor clear to your family*
- *talk to them about the “mitzva” of “pikuach nefesh”*
- *remind them that they will be fulfilling this “mitzva”*
- *remind them to consult with Rabbinical expert authorities at all stages if they have any concerns*

Office of the Chief Rabbi UK

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

Information on organ donation is available from:

The Organ Donor Line

0845 60 60 400

www.uktransplant.org.uk

If you need information, help, advice or support, contact your local Rabbi or the Office of the Chief Rabbi

Transplants save lives



Judaism and Organ Donation

A guide to organ donation
and Jewish 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. It is not the same as a 'coma' or 'persistent vegetative state'. No one can live once these centres have been destroyed. Tests are carried out to strict guidelines and show conclusively when this has happened.

Consent

The consent, or lack of objection, of those closest to the patient is always sought before organs can be donated. They can consult with their religious advisors and counsellors if they wish.

Donation is an individual choice and views differ even within the same religious groups. This is why it is so important for people to discuss their wishes with their loved ones. 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 **always** carried out with the greatest care and respect. The body can be seen afterwards if the family wishes.

Judaism and organ donation

In Judaism there is a strong tradition of caring for the sick. *Pikuach nefesh* (saving of life) takes priority. The *Talmud* rules that one is even permitted to infringe the laws of the Sabbath for this purpose.

Donating from one's body after death for *pikuach nefesh* is **not** forbidden in Jewish law.

Some Rabbinic experts in the field of medical ethics have ruled that donation falls into the category of a "positive obligation" or *mitzva chiyuvit*.

Concerns about organ donation are common to all. Jews are no different. At a time of stress and grief, linked to sudden unexpected illness and death, reaching a decision about donation can be difficult for a family. There is a widespread misconception that Jews do not donate organs.

Judaism takes a careful approach to the body of a dead person. Honour and respect are always due to the dead (*kavod hamet*). This includes avoiding needless mutilation (*nivul hamet*), not deriving benefit from a corpse (*hana'at hamet*) and not delaying the burial (*halanat hamet*).

A concern is that all organs are required by Jews at the time of any future resurrection – this is a misinterpretation.

Thus Rabbinical authorities consider organ donation in terms of *pikuach nefesh*, *kavod hamet* and *choleh lefanecha* – that you must not stand idly by when there is a sick patient before you. Modern communications mean that this could be in another hospital, town or country.

