

ConnectLife Myths and Misconceptions

Myth: If I agree to donate my organs, the hospital staff won't work as hard to save my life.

Fact:

When you go to the hospital for treatment, doctors focus on saving your life — not somebody else's. You'll be seen by a doctor whose specialty most closely matches your particular emergency.

Myth: Maybe I won't really be dead when they sign my death certificate.

Fact:

Although it's a popular topic in the tabloids, in reality, people don't start to wiggle their toes after they're declared dead. In fact, people who have agreed to organ donation are given more tests (at no charge to their families) to determine that they are truly dead than are those who have not agreed to organ donation.

Myth: Organ donation is against my religion.

Fact:

Organ donation is consistent with the beliefs of most major religions. This includes Roman Catholicism, Islam, most branches of Judaism and most Protestant faiths. If you're unsure of or uncomfortable with your faith's position on donation, ask a member of your clergy.

Myth: I'm under age 18. I'm too young to make this decision.

Fact:

A new law now allows 16 and 17 year olds in New York State to register as organ, eye and tissue donors. Prior to this legislation, the minimum age required for enrollment was eighteen. Now, 16 and 17 year olds will be able to join the NYS Donate Life Registry when visiting the DMV to obtain a learner's permit or driver's license or any other means allowable by the NYS Department of Health. If someone under the age of 18 is considered as a potential donor the law states parents or legal guardians will make the final determination on whether or not donation proceeds. Upon reaching the age of eighteen, the enrollment will be regarded as consent to donation.

Myth: An open-casket funeral isn't an option for people who have donated organs or tissues.

Fact:

Organ and tissue donation doesn't interfere with having an open-casket funeral. The donor's body is clothed for burial, so there are no visible signs of organ or tissue donation. For bone donation, a rod is inserted where bone is removed. With skin donation, a very thin layer of skin similar to a sunburn peel is taken from the donor's back. Because the donor is clothed and lying on his or her back in the casket, no one can see any difference.

Myth: I'm too old to donate. Nobody would want my organs.

Fact:

There's no defined cutoff age for donating organs. The decision to use your organs is based on strict medical criteria, not age. Don't disqualify yourself prematurely. Let the doctors decide at your time of death whether your organs and tissues are suitable for transplantation.

Myth: I'm not in the best of health. Nobody would want my organs or tissues.

Fact:

Very few medical conditions automatically disqualify you from donating organs. The decision to use an organ is based on strict medical criteria. It may turn out that certain organs are not suitable for transplantation, but other organs and tissues may be fine. Don't disqualify yourself prematurely. Only medical professionals at the time of your death can determine whether your organs are suitable for transplantation.

Myth: I'd like to donate one of my kidneys now, but I wouldn't be allowed to do that unless one of my family members is in need.

Fact:

Whether it's a distant family member, friend or complete stranger you want to help, you can donate a kidney through certain transplant centers. If you decide to become a living donor, you will undergo extensive questioning to ensure that you are aware of the risks and that your decision to donate isn't based on financial gain. You will also undergo testing to determine if your kidneys are in good shape and whether you can live a healthy life with just one kidney.

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Myth: Rich and famous people go to the top of the list when they need a donor organ.

Fact:

The rich and famous aren't given priority when it comes to allocating organs. It may seem that way because of the amount of publicity generated when celebrities receive a transplant, but they are treated no differently from anyone else. The reality is that celebrity and financial status are not considered in organ allocation. The National Transplant Act (Public Law 98-507) ensures that organ allocation is based on medical criteria, time spent on the waiting list, and geographic location. Also, patients are not indicated on the waiting list by name.

Myth: My family will be charged if I donate my organs.

Fact:

The organ donor's family is never charged for donating. The family is charged for the cost of all final efforts to save your life, and those costs are sometimes misinterpreted as costs related to organ donation. Costs for organ removal go to the transplant recipient.

Myth: I can sell my organs on the black market.

Fact:

NO! There is no black market for organs. Stories about black market are urban legends. The National Organ Transplant Act (Public Law 98-507) prohibits the sale of human organs. Violators are subject to fines and imprisonment. Due to the complex system of transplantation, piracy is practically impossible.