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CAN ANYONE BE AN
ORGAN DONOR?

Facts About Living Organ Donation



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SO, YOU THINK YOU MIGHT WANT TO BECOME A LIVING ORGAN DONOR? LET'S LOOK AT SOME OF THE QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.

1. WHY ARE HEALTHY PEOPLE BEING ASKED TO BE ORGAN DONORS?

More and more people need organ transplants, but there are not enough healthy organs. Only a few healthy organs come from accident victims. Those who wait for an organ transplant need healthy people to become living organ donors. A healthy person can offer one of their two kidneys. Once in a while, a healthy person may be able to donate part of his or her liver, lung, pancreas, or intestine to a person in need.

2. CAN ANYONE BE AN ORGAN DONOR?

Many people are asked by a loved one or a friend to be an organ donor. Others decide on their own that they wish to be organ donors. Either way, this decision should be yours alone. No one should pressure you into becoming an organ donor.

If you want to be an organ donor, you must be in good health. Some people with high blood pressure, diabetes, or other health problems may not be able to be organ donors. If giving an organ puts your long-term health at risk, you will not be able to be an organ donor. The transplant team will have the final say about the state of your health.

3. IS ORGAN DONATION PAINFUL?

All surgery can cause some pain while you recover. The amount of pain depends on the type of operation you have. Your transplant team will make sure you have the least amount of pain and discomfort. Most organ donors feel that the pain is easier to endure because they know that they have helped someone to live a longer, healthier life.

4. ARE THERE RISKS TO DONATION?

Before you donate an organ, the transplant team will make sure they know how much of a risk it will be for you to have a donor operation. They will talk with you about all the risks and benefits of being an organ donor. They will tell you about the choices they have if you decide not to be an organ donor. You will always be able to reach the transplant team with your questions.

5. CAN YOU GET PAID FOR BEING AN ORGAN DONOR?

No. It is against the law. You cannot get any money or gifts for being an organ donor, but you should not have to pay any of the costs. Your transplant program will pay for the tests to see if you can be an organ donor. It may also help you with the cost of travel and lodging for you and your family.

6. WHO PAYS THE COST OF ORGAN DONATION?

You do not pay for the tests to see if you can be a donor. You do not pay the hospital costs. However, you are responsible for your own health care after you donate the organ.

7. HOW LONG WILL MY RECOVERY TAKE?

Most donors feel good within 60 days. The actual time depends on the type of operation. Your transplant team will be able to give you a good idea of how long you will need to recover.

8. DO I TAKE LEAVE FROM WORK TO RECOVER?

Most donors use both sick leave and vacation to get better after the operation. Some federal and state employees can get special leave for organ donation. Some private employers also give special leave for organ donation. Talk to your employer and your transplant team to see if you can obtain a special leave.

9. WHAT CAN I EXPECT AFTER I DECIDE TO BE AN ORGAN DONOR?

First, you will meet with the transplant team, answer questions about your health, and have a physical exam. The team will order many tests for you. You will need to have a psychological exam to make sure you have thought through the decision to donate. Finally, a match test will be done to make sure that you and the person who will get your organ have the same tissue type. You will not be eligible for organ donation under the following conditions:

- There is not a tissue match between you and the person who is to receive your organ
- You do not understand the pros and cons of donation
- You are not acting freely
- You are not found to be healthy enough to donate

10. WHERE CAN I GO TO BE EVALUATED?

If you want to give an organ to a specific person, it is best to go to his or her transplant center. If you live far from that person's transplant program, that program will arrange to have your tests done close to you.

11. ARE THERE ANY LONG-TERM PROBLEMS AFTER DONOR SURGERY?

Because organ donors must be in good health, studies show that kidney donors are in better health than non-kidney donors. There should be no long-term problems. If you feel you are having problems as a result of your surgery, it is best to call your transplant program. In general, the transplant center does not give long-term health care to its donors.

12. WHAT HAPPENS IF I CHANGE MY MIND DURING THE DONOR TESTS?

You may decide not to be an organ donor at any time. The transplant team will always support your decision and will keep it private. If you choose not to donate, others will be told that you were not a good enough match to be a donor.