

Organ donation is one of the greatest advancements in modern medicine. It is a potential treatment option for someone who is suffering from an organ that is failing or an organ that has been irreversibly damaged by disease or injury. As of January 2019, there are more than 113,000 people formally listed and waiting for an organ transplant. In 2018, there were 35,528 organ transplant surgeries performed leaving over 77,000 patients waiting. Statistics show that 20 people die each day waiting for a suitable donor. Each year the number of people on the waitlist continues to grow and the number of donors is significantly less than what is needed.

Organ donation can come from a deceased or a living donor. Deceased organ donation is the process of donating an organ (or part of an organ) at the time of death for the purpose of surgically implanting it into a person who is on the transplant waitlist to save their life. A potential deceased donor is identified in the hospital setting after a patient has suffered from an illness or injury resulting in brain death. Only after all efforts at lifesaving techniques are exhausted and brain death is confirmed is organ donation considered. Deceased donors can donate the heart, two lungs (one per recipient), two kidneys (one per recipient), liver (can be split and donated to two recipients), pancreas, intestine, cornea, middle ear, skin, bone, bone marrow, heart valves, nerves and connective tissue. More recently, face and hands have been successfully transplanted! Living donation is another type of organ donation that occurs when the donor is alive and chooses to donate an organ to a person who is suffering from irreversible organ damage with the understanding that their remaining organ can function normally to maintain their own health. Living donors can donate one of their two kidneys, one of two lobes of their liver, part of the lung, pancreas and intestines and living tissue donation (blood, bone marrow, bone, skin and healthy cells).

People of any age or health, race or religion can be an organ and/or tissue donor. No one is too old, too young or too sick to be a donor. With the exception of active cancer or systemic infection there are very few conditions that would preclude someone from being an organ donor. Many people are surprised to learn that successful organ transplantation can be performed from a donor that has died from a drug overdose, traumatic injury or has a chronic illness such as HIV, Hepatitis, diabetes, etc. Experts in the medical field are trained to determine what organs are suitable for donation and matching the organ to the appropriate recipient. According to the American Transplant Foundation one deceased organ donation can save up to eight lives and enhance more than 100 lives through the gift of tissue donation!

So what can you do? Register to be an organ donor. You can do this online in the national registry or in your state of residence which can be easily accessed if there is ever a question of a deceased person's wishes at the time of death. Talk to your family and friends. Expressing your desire to be an organ donor and having discussions around organ donation makes your wishes known to family and friends who may be asked to make difficult decisions in the time of tragedy. Help raise public awareness by sharing stories about successful lifesaving organ transplants with your friends and family through social media or volunteer at the many organizations in your area to educate others. You can learn more and register to donate at www.donatelifenewengland.org or www.organdonor.gov.

