

How it works:

The donation and transplant process

The need for donated organs and tissues is growing at a much greater rate than their availability. And while transplantation is now considered a standard medical treatment for a wide variety of conditions, it is important to remember that without an individual saying “yes” to donation, transplants are not possible.

Commitment to Donation

The process of organ and tissue donation begins with an individual’s commitment to share the gift of life. This single decision helps bring something positive to a tragic situation. A person might have registered to be a donor during their lifetime or their family might make the decision to donate on their behalf.

Waiting for the Gift of Life

When it has been determined that a person is in end-stage organ failure and the only hope is a transplant, the patient will go through a series of medical and psychological tests before they are listed for a transplant. Once all of the pre-transplant requirements are met, he or she is placed on the United Network of Organ Sharing (UNOS) National Transplant Waiting List.

Individuals waiting for an organ transplant are listed in the UNOS computer based upon their personal medical characteristics (severity of illness, blood type, tissue type, body size, geographic location, etc.). These characteristics are utilized to determine a match when there is an organ donor. The amount of time that an individual will have to wait for a transplant can vary from a few hours to many years.

Sharing the Gift of Life

When a death occurs, all hospitals are required by Medicare to contact an independent organ procurement organization (OPO), like LifeSource. The OPO evaluates the individual for the potential to donate organs and/or tissues and searches for the person’s donation decision, if they documented it during their lifetime. If they did not make a decision during their lifetime, their family is asked to make a decision about donation on their behalf.

LifeSource coordinators work with hospital staff to support the donor’s family, facilitate the placement of the organs with waiting recipients, and the recovery process which includes delivery to the transplant centers. This process ensures neither the hospital nor the transplant center is involved in the donation process.

Organ Recovery and Transplant

Once an organ has been donated, the best transplant candidate match is identified and contacted by the transplant center. The prospective recipient then goes directly to the hospital to receive their transplant. Following a transplant, recovery times can vary from a few days to several months. To ensure the body accepts the new organ, transplant recipients need to take immunosuppressive drugs daily.

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Tissue Donation and Transplant

With tissue donation, there is not a single national waiting list. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates the country's tissue banks. Medical matching for tissue donation is not necessary because the donated tissue is carefully prepared before it is implanted into a recipient.

Continuing Care

The families of all LifeSource donors receive compassionate care in the months and years following their loved one's donation. This includes grief resources and information, facilitation of correspondence between donor families and transplant recipients, and remembrance events.

For more information

Visit www.life-source.org for more information about the process of donation, LifeSource programs and our service and education in communities in the Upper Midwest.