

Organ Donation After Circulatory Death (DCD)

Once your family has decided to withdraw life-sustaining therapies, your loved one has the rare opportunity to become an organ and tissue donor.

This difficult time is overwhelming for many families, but hospital staff and Versiti Family Services Specialists are here to help.

What can be shared

Your loved one can save up to eight lives by donating their heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, pancreas and intestine. Each organ is evaluated individually, and the most accurate evaluation occurs in the operating room.

Heart

For heart evaluation, an echocardiogram may be completed. This is a noninvasive ultrasound of the heart that will see how well it is pumping. A cardiac catheterization may also be completed to assess for blockages in coronary arteries. A heart pump or preservation technique called normothermic regional perfusion (NRP) may be utilized. NRP only happens after the declaration of death has occurred and involves restarting circulation to the heart and other organs using a cardiac bypass machine. Through surgical intervention, perfusion is limited to thoracic and abdominal organs being evaluated for transplant, and not the brain.

Lungs

To evaluate the lungs, a bronchoscopy is done. During this minimally invasive procedure, a camera is inserted into the breathing tube to evaluate the lungs and monitor oxygen levels.

Liver, Kidneys, Pancreas and Intestine

Prior to evaluation in the operating room, laboratory test results are monitored.

The process

The average length of evaluation prior to organ recovery is approximately 24-36 hours. During this time, organ recipients are located and evaluated by their transplant surgeons to ensure the best match. This time is necessary to ensure your loved one's gifts are maximized.

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How recipients are found

The United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) is a federally operated network that is responsible for ensuring organs are allocated to appropriate recipients. When organs are allocated, the Organ Donation Specialist starts at the top of the UNOS list, prioritizing recipients who are the sickest or the best match. Social status, race or financial incentive never affect an individual's ability to receive an organ transplant.

What to expect post-transplant

After your loved one's organ recovery is complete, if you would like, a Family Services Specialist will contact you with an update and let you know which of your loved one's organs were shared. We welcome questions and ask that you provide funeral home information if you have not already done so.

Within two weeks of your loved one's donation, you will begin to receive correspondence from our Aftercare program. These may include information about your loved one's organ recipient(s), grief and loss resources, opportunities to request donation recognition items, and information about Versiti Organ and Tissue's programs.