

Organ donation

Organ donation is when you give an organ to save or improve someone else's life.

You can donate some organs while you are alive. This is called living organ donation. But most organ donations are from people who have died.

Every year, hundreds of people in Ireland have their lives saved by organ donation.

When organ donation is possible

Not many people die in a way that makes it possible to donate their organs.

Medical criteria and other conditions must be met. A potential donor has to be in a hospital and maintained on a life support machine (ventilator) before they can become an organ donor.

A person's organs can be donated after:

- brain stem death
- cardiac death

In both of these cases, there is no hope of recovery.

How organ donation works

If you decide to donate your organs, they will only be removed when 2 doctors, working independently, have certified that you are dead following many tests.

Doctors and nurses carry out the operation in a hospital operating theatre.

All organs donated reach the best matched people in Ireland. If there is no suitable match in Ireland, they are used in the UK or other EU countries. This allows the donor to save as many lives as possible.

Which organs can be donated

Organs that can be donated in Ireland are:

- heart

- lungs
- liver
- pancreas
- kidneys

A choice about which organs to donate

If you decide to become an organ donor, you can choose to donate all or some of your organs. Tell your next of kin about your decision. Your next of kin is a designated family member or a close friend who can consent to this decision.

Only organs that your next of kin gives consent for can be donated.

If you have a medical condition

If you have a medical condition, you may still be able to be an organ donor. This will be checked by a healthcare professional and discussed with your next of kin at the time of your death.

After organ donation

The donor coordinator will write to the donor family after a few weeks. They will give an update on each person who benefitted from the organ donation.

The donor's identity and the person who received the donated organs are kept confidential.

Funeral arrangements

Donating your organs does not change how your body looks or delay your funeral arrangements. There will be no visible signs of organ donation if you want to have an open casket (coffin) funeral.

How to become an organ donor

When someone dies, their next of kin decides whether to donate their organs or not. Talk to your next of kin about what you would like to do.

A new law called the Human Tissue Act 2024 will be in place soon. It will introduce an opt-out system of consent for organ donation.

This means you can add your name to an opt-out register if you do not want to be an organ donor. If you are on the opt-out register, your next of kin will not be asked about organ donation.

If you want to be an organ donor, you do not need to take any action with the opt-out register.

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