Tissue Donation and Transplantation

Tissue transplantation is one of the most remarkable success stories in the history of medicine. More than 1.75 million lifesaving and healing tissue transplants are performed each year, offering patients a new chance at healthy, productive and normal lives. You are likely to have a neighbor, friend or even a family member who has received a tissue transplant. This is often a necessary part of medical treatment for a multitude of diseases and injuries, from bone fracture or ligament repair to heart surgery.

Although there is a critical shortage of some tissue for transplant, many Americans have never thought about being a tissue donor. Like organ donation, it’s an opportunity to share your life with others.

You have the power to change someone’s world by being a tissue donor. It’s about living. It’s about Life.

One tissue donor can help heal the lives of more than 75 people.

- **Bone** is used to restore mobility in people who would otherwise be incapacitated or disabled, to rebuild a jaw affected by cancer or severe gum disease and to reconstruct limbs damaged by trauma or disease.
- **Corneas** are used to restore sight to people who have been injured by disease, infection or trauma.
- **Heart valves** can be lifesaving to children born with absent or damaged heart valves and to adults with life-threatening cardiac defects and damage.
- **Ligaments and tendons** are used to rebuild joints and restore strength, mobility and independence for patients injured in sporting activities, by trauma, or from arthritis or other diseases.
- **Nerves** can restore mobility and sensation to patients who have been injured by disease, infection or trauma. Nerve tissue is unique because it has the ability to regenerate.
- **Skin grafts** help burn patients heal and often mean the difference between life and death. Skin grafts protect against infection and pain while the patient’s own skin is healing. Many types of surgeries, such as open heart and urological surgeries, abdominal wall repair and post-mastectomy breast reconstruction also utilize skin grafts.
- **Veins and arteries** are used in heart bypass surgery to re-establish blood circulation in patients with coronary artery disease. For those who have lost circulation in their legs, donated veins can help to avoid leg amputation.

**Tissue donation is about Life. Many are in need. You have the power to save lives and restore health.**

Kacey suffered devastating injuries during the Columbine High School shooting of 1999. To prevent the loss of her arm, Kacey’s surgeons rebuilt her shoulder and arm with donated bone and tissue. Today, Kacey is a mother of four and inspires others by sharing her story and advocating for donation. “I would love to tell my donor, ‘Thank you.’”
Is all donated tissue used for transplantation? When donated tissue cannot be used for transplantation, it may be used for approved medical education and research such as evaluating new disease treatments, improving transplantation and surgical techniques, and developing new medications. Using tissue for these purposes may be done only if the appropriate consent is given.

Facts about Tissue Donation

FACT: All major religions support organ, eye and tissue donation as an unselfish act of charity.

FACT: Regardless of a donor’s vision or existence of cataracts and other conditions, corneas have the potential to restore sight to a person with corneal blindness.

FACT: Tissue donation occurs within 12-24 hours of death and should not delay or change funeral arrangements. An open casket funeral is possible.

FACT: There is no cost to the donor’s family or estate for donation. The donor family pays only for medical expenses before death and standard costs associated with funeral arrangements.

FACT: In the United States, it is illegal to buy or sell organs or tissue for transplantation.

FACT: To preserve anonymity, the identities of the donor and the recipients are confidential. Tissue-bank personnel may provide donor families with general information about how donated tissue was used.

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Frequently Asked Questions about Tissue Donation

Who can be a donor?

Tissue donation is an option for most individuals, regardless of age, and is often possible even when organ donation is not. Your commitment to donate will not interfere with your medical care. At the time of death, trained medical staff will determine the medical suitability of the donor.

A history of cancer, diabetes, broken bones or some other illnesses or injuries does not necessarily prohibit tissue donation. Guidelines are followed to ensure that the donor is free of any infectious disease that might, in turn, harm a tissue recipient. Until all medical tests and screenings are complete, the tissue is not released for transplant.

How is donation accomplished?

Tissue donation becomes an option only after all lifesaving efforts have been made and the donor has died. After consent has been received, the donated tissue is recovered by skilled medical professionals in a surgical setting. The donor’s body is treated with the utmost care and respect. Unlike organs, which must be transplanted within hours of donation, tissue is preserved for later use. Tissue is stored in facilities called “tissue banks” and supplied to physicians when needed for their patients.

For Jamie, an avid basketball and volleyball player, her world was turned upside down when a collision on the basketball court tore her anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). Only a knee operation—and the gift of donated tissue to replace her ligament—would restore her mobility. Thanks to a generous tissue donor, Jamie has returned to the court and is a happy and active teenager again.

Making the decision to donate

The decision to donate is a personal one. Once you decide to donate life by becoming a tissue donor, designate your decision in your state’s donor registry or on your driver’s license at your Motor Vehicle Department. It is always important to let your family know of your commitment since they will be consulted during the donation process.

Register to be an organ, eye and tissue donor at DonateLife.net.

Complete and give to your family.

Dear Family,

I want you to know about my decision to become an organ, eye and tissue donor. Upon my death, I am a candidate for donation, I ask that you assist in carrying out my commitment to donate Life.

It is important to me that others are given the opportunity to live full and productive lives through the gift of organ, eye and tissue donation.

Donor Name ____________________________

Donor Signature __________________________

Date ____________________________

The American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB) is a non-profit, educational and scientific organization founded in 1976 to enhance and save lives by promoting and facilitating the safety, quality and availability of donated human tissue. The AATB accredits tissue banks, certifies tissue-bank personnel to ensure that tissue-banking activities are performed in the highest professional manner.

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FACT: Tissue is distributed based on patient need, availability and medical criteria. Tissue recipients range from newborns to senior citizens.

Visit DonateLife.net for more information.

Donate Life America is a not-for-profit alliance of national organizations and state teams across the United States. Its mission is to drive individuals, organizations and communities to increase the number of designated organ, eye and tissue donors who save and heal lives.