

Tissue Donation





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Some of the operations that are done routinely to help save and improve the lives of patients are only possible because of tissue donation. For example a newborn born with a hole in their heart may need surgery that requires a donated heart valve or a patient who has had an accident may need knee surgery that requires a donated tendon.

Such donations are made by people who have decided they would like to help others in perhaps one of the most meaningful and lasting ways possible.

They are Tissue Donors: people who have decided to allow some of their tissues to be donated after their death so that others can benefit.

What is tissue donation?

Every year hundreds of lives are saved with the help of donated organs such as hearts and kidneys. Donated tissues such as heart valves, tendons, skin and corneas can also dramatically improve the quality of life for recipients, and even save lives.

Can anyone donate tissues?

Many people can be considered for tissue donation following death. It is important to discuss your wishes with your family, join the organ donor register and carry a donor card. This makes it easier for the subject of tissue donation to be raised and discussed with your family by health care staff.

Tissues can be donated up to 48 hours after a person has died. The tissues donated by one donor can enable up to eleven people to benefit from tissue transplant surgery, thus helping each recipient to return to a healthy life.

Russell was 57 years old when he died suddenly of a heart attack. The fun-loving, kind and giving man had always been very vocal about his wishes to be a tissue donor. In the hours after his death, his family granted his wishes and his heart valves, tendons and corneas were donated.



Russell

His daughter Laura said: “We had spoken about his wishes in the past and I remember having conversations with my Dad about it. It is a real comfort to know that my Dad was able to go on helping people after his death. He always wanted to do the best for other people. He was such a giving and generous man. It is a comfort to know that a part of him is still out there and that we were able to help fulfil his wishes. He was just the best guy.”



What tissues can be donated after death?

Many kinds of tissues can be donated after death.

- **Heart valves** save the lives of patients who have an abnormality in their heart, or diseased or damaged heart valves. With a transplanted heart valve young children and young adults born with heart abnormalities can grow up and lead a full life.
- **Tendons** are used to help people walk again after injury and restore a normal pain free life.
- **Corneas** help patients suffering from severe eye disease or injury regain their sight.
- **Skin** helps save the lives of severely burned victims; it can take many donations of skin to treat just one patient.

Why is tissue donation so important?

A tissue transplant greatly enhances the quality of people's lives and may even save lives.

Donation of tissues, especially in cases when organ donation is not possible, can offer the opportunity for families to fulfil their loved one's wishes.

Many bereaved families take comfort in the knowledge that their loved one has helped others.

Christine was 60 when she died suddenly. Described by her family as a giver and always helping others, she was able to continue to do so even after her death by donating her corneas.

Her daughter Denise said:
“Knowing that my Mum’s gift has helped two people has been a great comfort to our family. We take comfort from the fact that a part of my Mum is still out there and that she has been able to carry on helping others. My Mum would have felt it was the least she could have done.”



Christine

What is the process?

Family interviews are carried out by specially trained nurses called Tissue Donor Co-ordinators and Specialist Nurses in Organ Donation, who will help carry out the wishes of the donor and their family.

In order to ensure that donated tissues are as safe as possible, the donor’s medical and behavioural history is reviewed in a similar way as that of blood donors. This reduces the risk of transmitting disease to a recipient. A blood sample is also taken from the donor and tested for viruses including HIV and Hepatitis.

Before he was born, Alex was diagnosed with a rare form of heart disease. This meant he required life-saving surgery and at two weeks old, he needed his first operation. Alex was given a donated heart valve but unfortunately it later failed. At 18 months of age he faced further surgery to receive a replacement valve.

Alex



Alex's mum, Julie, said: "After his first operation he did remarkably well, but there were complications which left him with difficulties. He then required a further valve replacement and is doing fab now. His heart is doing great and looking at him you wouldn't even know anything was wrong."

"It's very humbling, somebody else lost their child and enabled me to keep mine. It's been twice in our case and it's made a huge difference, my little boy is running around enjoying life."

Alex is now a happy child, although he is likely to need more procedures throughout his life.

Chris, a keen sportsman, damaged the ligaments in his knee whilst snowboarding. A donated tendon was used to replace the damaged ligament. Within six months Chris was back playing tennis and snowboarding a year later.

Chris

He said: "I know that the transplant was not life saving, but it is the difference between living and loving life. My knee feels much stronger today than before the accident."



"I am lucky to have been given this opportunity."

**One
donor**

**can change or
save the lives
of up to eleven
people.**



Contact us

To help others after your death,
make your wishes known by telling
your family or next of kin and join
the Organ Donor

Register by calling: **0300 123 23 23**
or visit organdonation.nhs.uk

**Scottish National Blood
Transfusion Service**

This publication can also be made available in large print, braille (English only), audio tape and in different languages.

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