

often wish to consult with their own experts in Jewish law and tradition before making a final decision.

Judaism holds that organs may not be removed from a donor until death has definitely occurred. Again, for some Jews the 'brain stem death' criteria are acceptable. Other Jews will only agree to removal of organs from a 'non-heart beating' donor. The latter approach may cause problems concerning heart and lung transplants, where time is of the essence, but does not exclude donation of other organs.

After donation it is important to recognise that *kavod hamet* still applies. In Judaism avoidance of any further unnecessary interference with the body and immediate internment are again the prime concern.

Judaism, therefore, approaches the question of organ donation very much on a case-by-case basis. Also

on an individual basis, if the families wish to seek advice in most instances they would make an approach to their own known and respected religious adviser. If they are unable to obtain such advice easily, or in circumstances of uncertainty, the main religious organisations (e.g. United Synagogue, Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, Spanish and Portuguese Synagogues, Federation of Synagogues, Masorti Synagogues, Reform Judaism, Union of Liberal and Progressive Judaism) can provide useful supportive information. In all instances the principles of *kavod hamet* and *pikuach nefesh* would be considered, and in addition during the difficult decision process Judaism would also incorporate another principle, which must not be neglected: that of providing *nichum aveilim* – comfort for those who are bereaved.

**“One who saves a single life – it is as if he has saved an entire world”**

Pirke D’Rav Eliezer, Chapter 48



### How do I become a donor?

If you decide you would like to become a donor on your death, you need to join the NHS Organ Donor Register to ensure your wishes are recorded. Discuss your decision with those closest to you so that they are aware of your wishes. Adding your name to the register is simple and quick:

You can register online at [organdonationni.info](http://organdonationni.info)

Or call **0300 123 23 23**

To find out more about organ and tissue donation, visit [organdonationni.info](http://organdonationni.info)

# Organ donation and religious beliefs

**A guide to organ donation and Jewish beliefs**

# Judaism and organ donation

## Organ donation

Organ donation is the gift of an organ to help someone else who needs a transplant. Hundreds of people's lives are saved or improved each year by organ transplants.

Organs that can be donated by people who have died include the heart, lungs, kidneys, liver, pancreas and small bowel. Tissue such as heart valves and corneas can also be used to help others.

Donation is an individual choice and views differ even within the same religious groups.

## Why is it important to think about donating organs?

With medical advances it is now possible to use transplanted organs and tissues to enhance the life chances of those suffering from a range of terminal conditions such as renal, liver and heart failure. More people than before now suffer from these conditions and some ethnic groups seem to be more affected than others.

The person in need of an organ today may be a stranger, but tomorrow that person could be someone you know and love dearly. So please take the time to think about becoming an organ donor and discuss your thoughts with loved ones.

## Consent

The consent or permission of those closest to the potential donor is always sought before organs can be donated. This is why it is so important to discuss your wishes with your loved ones should you decide to become a donor. Many families who agree to organ donation have said that it helps to know some good has come from their loss.

## When can organ donation take place?

Doctors and their colleagues are committed to doing everything possible to save life. Organs are only removed for transplantation once all attempts to save life have failed and after death has been certified by doctors who are entirely independent of the transplant team.

Most donated organs in the UK come from people who die from a severe brain injury, and who are on a ventilator in an Intensive Care Unit. The brain injury will have damaged the vital centres in the brain stem which are essential to maintain life. Doctors call this 'brain stem death'. This is not the same as being in a coma or 'persistent vegetative state'. Tests are carried out to strict guidelines to show conclusively when this has happened. When brain stem death is pronounced the patient may still be on a ventilator, and have a heart beat which continues to circulate blood around the body. This prevents the organs from losing the oxygen-rich blood supply which is necessary for a healthier transplanted outcome.

Organs can also be donated from people whose death has been certified because their heart has stopped. Certification in these 'non-heart beating' donors is also by doctors who are entirely independent of the transplant team.

## Care and respect

The removal of organs and tissues is carried out with the greatest care and respect. The family can see the body afterwards and staff can contact a chaplain or local religious leader if the family wishes.

## Judaism and organ donation

In principle Judaism sanctions and encourages organ donation in order to save lives (*pikuach nefesh*). This principle can override the Jewish objections to any unnecessary interference with the body after death, and the requirement for immediate burial.

It is understandable that there will be worries and concerns for the Jewish family who are asked to consider organ donation. At a time of stress and grief, linked to sudden unexpected illness and death, reaching a decision can be difficult for them. They may be worried that giving consent may not be consistent with the honour and respect that Jews believe is due to the dead (*kavod hamet*). Judaism considers each case as different, and recognises that at this time any known wishes of the dead person can be valuable. For example, some people will tell their families to consult with specific Rabbis or religious authorities. Some Jewish groups encourage their members to join the NHS Organ Donor Register.

In Judaism, whether or not the wishes of the dead person are known, it is widely recognised that families are entitled to decide for themselves; and that they will

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