



Donating your body to medical research

Research on human cells and tissues is providing valuable new insights into the processes that underlie human health and disease. The bodies of humans and other animal species work in subtly different ways, right down to the cellular level.

Donating tissues to research will help medical progress and may help to replace animal research. The severe shortage of human organs available for transplants has resulted in extensive research to use animal organs for this purpose, which can involve severe animal suffering.

Tissue and Organ Donation

Transplants

There is a long established and well-organised, nationwide system of collecting whole organs, bone, skin and eye tissue for use in transplants. However, some donated tissues and organs that prove unsuitable for transplant may instead be supplied for research purposes, with the permission of the donor or next-of-kin. If you wish tissue from your body to be used in research after death, you should consider registering as an organ donor.

At present, the health care system prioritises organs and tissues for transplantation first, before research.

Brain banks

A number of brain banks exist around the country that collect and store tissue for research into serious neurological disorders, such as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's disease and multiple sclerosis. It is possible to arrange to leave your brain to these banks, and several produce information packs for donors. There is a severe shortage of non-diseased brains at most of these banks and donations are urgently needed.

For further details, contact the Human Tissue Authority.

Tissue banks

Some hospitals have their own tissue storage facilities for supplying in-house researchers with specific tissue types. If you are undergoing treatment at a hospital you can always ask if such facilities exist and if your tissues can be used.

Medical Training

Medical students learn anatomy by dissecting human cadavers and there is a shortage of donor bodies for training doctors. To arrange to leave your body to a medical school for use in training doctors you should contact the Human Tissue Authority.

FAQs

Can I leave my body to Animal Free Research UK for research?

No. We do not have facilities to store or distribute donated bodies or tissue.

Can I ensure that my body is used in research?

There is no 100% guarantee that your body will ultimately be used in research. This will depend on a number of factors impossible to predict, including where, when and how you die. For example, death from an infection may make it impractical to collect or use your tissues. The facilities available to preserve your body will be an important factor, as tissues need to be collected very quickly, usually within a few hours of death.





How will donating my body affect the funeral arrangements?

Usually organs and tissues are collected by specially trained hospital staff within a matter of hours of death. Your body is returned and your family should be able to make normal funeral arrangements without any undue delay.

Important steps you need to take

It is vitally important that you inform your next-of-kin of your wishes. Although the wishes of the deceased should be carried out, your next-of-kin are likely to be asked for consent for your tissues to be used in medical research.

Investigate the possibilities now. Tissues deteriorate rapidly after death and quickly become unusable. Organs need to be collected within 4 - 6 hours of death, although some tissues may be collected up to 48 hours after death. Because time is of the essence, you should explore the possibilities in advance and register your willingness to donate tissues with a hospital or tissue bank where possible.

Consider registering with the NHS Organ Donor Register and carrying a donor card. In the event of your death, your organs will be considered for transplant first, and failing this they can be used in research. An increase in the availability of human organs would reduce the demand for animal organs and tissues for both transplant and research.

Ask your local hospital. If you are having a biopsy taken or you are about to undergo an operation, you can ask the hospital if your tissues can be used in research. Whether this is possible or not will depend on what research is taking place locally that requires the type of tissue taken from you, and availability of tissue banking facilities.

Contact addresses

- **Organ Donor Register:** Organ donor cards may be available at your local pharmacy or doctor's surgery.
Telephone: 0300 1232323
Website: uktransplant.org.uk
- **Human Tissue Authority**
Telephone: 020 7269 1900
Website: hta.gov.uk
- **Ethical Tissue:** Collects and supplies a range of human tissue from patients and healthy volunteers for biomedical research.
Telephone: 0127 423 5897
Website: brad.ac.uk/acad/ethicaltissue
- **MRC Brain Bank for Neurodegenerative Disease:**
Telephone: 020 7848 0290
Website: mrc.ac.uk
- **Multiple Sclerosis and Parkinson's Tissue Bank:**
Telephone: 020 7594 9734 (MS)
020 7594 9732 (Parkinson's)
Website: imperial.ac.uk/medicine/multiple-sclerosis-and-parkinsons-tissue-bank/

All external contact information and links correct at time of printing.

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