

# Thinking About Becoming an Organ Donor?

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## Clinical Contributors to this Story

[Michael J. Goldstein, M.D.](#) contributes to topics such as **Surgery**.

In the United States, there is currently a dramatic organ shortage. On average, according to the American Transplant Foundation, approximately 20 people per day die due to the lack of available transplant organs in this country alone. There is always a need for more donors, both living and deceased, but not everyone is aware of how their organs can save lives.

Becoming an organ donor is as selfless as it is vital. “Donating an organ is one of the most generous acts someone can perform,” says **Michael J. Goldstein, M.D.**, FACS, interim chief of organ transplantation, director of kidney and pancreas transplantation, and director of pediatric abdominal transplantation at **Hackensack University Medical Center**. “For living donors, it’s an even more honorable and rewarding experienced. Being able to see first-hand that you’ve helped save or enhance a life is truly special.”

If you’ve considered becoming an organ donor, here is what you should about who is eligible, what is needed and how to become one.

**Who can become a donor?** Almost any healthy and able-bodied person can become an organ donor, at any age. However, having a serious health condition, such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, kidney disease or heart disease would prevent you from becoming a donor. If you are under 18 years old, you must get parental permission first prior to becoming a donor.

**What organs can I donate?** For deceased donors, the heart, kidneys, lungs, liver, pancreas and intestines can be harvested for transplant. In addition, deceased donors can also provide certain tissue transplants, such as skin, bone and tendons, along with corneas to give a potential recipient the ability to see again. While most organ and tissue donations occur after the donor has died, some organs and tissues can be donated while the donor is alive. Live donations include a kidney, part of your liver, a whole or partial lung, part of your intestines or part of your pancreas.

**Do I need to be a match with the recipient?** While it may be much easier to successfully transplant an organ if the donor and recipient are a good blood/tissue match, there are options to rectify this situation. It may be possible do a transplant even if there is no match, while giving the patient special treatments in order to ensure his or her body doesn’t reject the new organ.

Another option could be passing the goodwill forward. Dr. Goldstein shares a story of how one woman’s kidney donation ended up saving multiple lives.

“I told the donor, ‘We can help more than one person by giving your kidney to someone who has a potential donor who’s not compatible with them. In return for receiving your kidney, that person’s donor can then give their kidney to someone else in need,’” Dr. Goldstein says. “We could save two people with one kidney. The donor loved that idea.”

**How do I sign up?** The process is fairly simple if you’re interested in becoming a live donor. If the person you wish to donate an organ to is a friend or family member, you can reach out to that person’s medical transplant team. If you wish to donate an organ to a stranger in need, contact a transplant center in your area in order to determine proper procedure.

There are no financial implications or other risks involved in becoming an organ donor post-mortem. You can sign up for New Jersey’s organ donation registry online or when you receive or renew your driver’s license. For more information, or to register online, visit [organdonor.gov](#).

Learn more about the [organ transplantation program at Hackensack Meridian Health](#).

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