



**MiMi**

**Das Gesundheitsprojekt  
Mit Migranten für Migranten  
in Bayern**

**Ethno-  
Medizinisches  
Zentrum e.V.**



# Organ donation – the gift of life



Unser Beitrag zum

**Masterplan  
Prävention  
Bayern**

Initiator des Masterplans:

Bayerisches Staatsministerium für  
Gesundheit, Pflege und Prävention



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Also available online at  
[www.organspende-mehrsprachig.de](http://www.organspende-mehrsprachig.de)

## Why do we need organ donations?

In Germany, more than 8,000 people are currently waiting for a donor organ. Many of them suffer from serious illness. Heart, lungs, liver and kidneys are most commonly affected. These are vital organs; they are essential for life.

Medical procedures can replace some organ functions. However, this is only possible for a short time, and is not without side effects. For example, people with kidney failure use dialysis. Dialysis performs the task of the kidneys. This medical procedure takes up several hours every week. It severely impacts everyday living and quality of life. And it often shortens life expectancy. An artificial heart, too, can only assist temporarily and carries risks.

Transplanting a healthy organ is often the only option for a long-term cure. For this purpose, people donate their organs after their death. Under certain conditions, individual organs continue to function even after death, and can save the lives of others.

A single person can help up to seven seriously ill people by donating vital organs.

You will find the most important information about organ donation here. It is intended to help you decide whether you want to be an organ donor. Organ donation is a topic that concerns us all. Any one of us may one day require a donated organ.

## What is donated and who can donate?

Doctors transplant vital organs such as the heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, pancreas and intestines. Tissues such as the cornea, heart valves, blood vessels, skin and bones can also be donated.

Age is no barrier to organ donation. In principle, any person can become an organ donor. The medical status of the organs is more important than the donor's date of birth.

In each individual case, specialised doctors check in detail whether organ donation is possible. They assess each organ individually. The lungs of a smoker may not be suitable for donation. Their heart, liver and kidneys, however, may be healthy.

Even pre-existing medical conditions do not automatically preclude organ donation. Only serious infections or active cancers preclude organ donation to protect the recipient.

For transplantation to be successful, doctors consider which donated organs will suit which recipient. Nevertheless, the recipient's immune system will always respond to the donated organ as a foreign object. Modern medications help with this. They prevent the body from rejecting the new organ in most cases. Today, transplanted organs often function reliably for many years.

## Who receives the donated organs and tissues?

The Transplantation Act (Transplantationsgesetz, TPG) governs the allocation of donated organs in Germany. The independent institution Eurotransplant in Leiden (Netherlands) allocates donor organs in Europe according to medical criteria. The aim is the fair and transparent distribution of the available organs.

In the first place, the suitability of the organs is considered. Organs are then allocated according to urgency and the prospects of successful transplantation.

Doctors assess potential recipients accordingly. Psychological and social factors also play an important role. Transplantation requires lifelong medical care and the reliable cooperation of recipients.

This includes, for example, taking medication regularly and participating in follow-up examinations. Consuming addictive substances such as alcohol, drugs or nicotine are often barriers to receiving a transplant. In many cases, those affected must demonstrate abstinence over a longer period of time. Abstinence means not consuming addictive substances.



Furthermore, medical characteristics such as blood type, body size, weight, age and the properties of body tissues determine the allocation of organs. It is also important that the time between organ removal and transplantation is kept as short as possible because organs can only be kept alive outside the body for a short time.

Donors and recipients remain anonymous. This means that they don't know each other's names. Recipients don't know who the donor is, and the donor's loved ones don't know who the recipients are. This way the identity of the parties involved is protected by law in order to prevent a sense of personal obligation from arising. This type of protection ensures mutual respect.

For loved ones, organ donation can offer solace. It often helps them to know that the donated organs have benefitted others who are seriously ill. To facilitate this, the German Organ Procurement Organization (Deutsche Stiftung Organtransplantation, DSO) can pass anonymised thank you letters between the donor's loved ones and the organ recipients.



## When can organs and tissues be removed?

In Germany, strict laws govern the removal of organs and tissues. Doctors only remove organs when the donor's death has been established beyond doubt. Two independent medical experts confirm the definitive and irreversible loss of brain functions ('brain death').

In addition, there must always be consent to organ donation so that removal can take place. This must happen quickly, as many organs only remain functional outside the body for a short time. Professionals coordinate the necessary steps.

It is helpful if the donor's wishes are clearly documented. An entry in the organ donation register or the Advance Care Directive, or an organ donor's card are recommended. This way the wishes of the deceased person can be followed unequivocally.

If the deceased person has not made a decision about organ donation during their lifetime, their next of kin will decide. They are supposed to act according to the deceased's wishes. If the deceased's intentions are not known, the next of kin decide according to their own values.

This is a difficult situation for loved ones to be in. They are to make a consequential decision at a time of loss. Making a decision early and talking about it with loved ones can take the stress out of the situation. And it also helps with respecting the deceased's wishes.

## How are organ donations organised and regulated?

In Germany, organ donation is strictly regulated by law. Legal basis is the Transplantation Act (Transplantationsgesetz, TPG). It ensures safety, transparency and fairness for all parties involved.

It is very important to separate the different areas involved in organ donation.

Independent teams take on the various tasks. One team determines the death, another allocates the organs, and a third carries out the transplant surgery. This clear separation of areas prevents conflicts of interest.

### The role of the German Organ Procurement Organization

Organ donation is organised and coordinated in Germany by the non-profit German Organ Procurement Organization (Deutsche Stiftung Organtransplantation, DSO) based in Frankfurt am Main. It has several regional branches.

The DSO supports hospitals with all processes related to organ donation.

This includes:

- The medical examination to determine whether organ donation is possible
- Organising surgical removal of donated organs
- Preservation and transport of donated organs
- Coordination with transplant centres.

The DSO also provides organisational support to participating hospitals and assists them with quality assurance. Independent committees constantly monitor the DSO's activities.

### Organ allocation

Donated organs are allocated via the independent Eurotransplant agency based in Leiden (Netherlands). Eurotransplant works internationally to quickly find suitable recipients for each organ in its member countries (Germany, Belgium, Croatia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria, Slovenia and Hungary). Selection is made according to medical criteria such as urgency, prospects of success and physiological compatibility.

### The role of transplant officers

Each hospital with an intensive care unit has specially trained transplant officers. They are experienced doctors and nurses who work independently and report directly to the hospital executive.

They identify potential organ donors, coordinate the necessary processes and help relatives navigate this difficult situation. They also train medical staff on the topic of organ donation.

Important: transplant officers are not involved in organ allocation or the subsequent organ transplant surgeries. This ensures that organ donation is transparent and carried out without conflicts of interest.

## What is the process of organ donation?

Organ donations follow a fixed, medical process. Respect for the deceased and their loved ones is paramount.

‘Brain death’ is a prerequisite for organ donation. This condition is caused, for example, by severe bleeds in the brain, an accident, or a massive lack of oxygen supply to the brain.

Brain death marks the time of death in medical as well as legal terms. Two medical specialists independently determine that a person has suffered brain death. They confirm that the brain has irretrievably lost all its functions.

After brain death, a person can no longer breathe on their own. Machines artificially maintain breathing and circulation. Medications support this intervention. Without these measures, organs would no longer be supplied with oxygen. Circulation and organ activity would come to a standstill. However, supplying the organs with oxygen is a prerequisite for their subsequent use in transplantation.

### Consent

After death has been determined, specialists check whether the deceased person has consented to organ donation. It's best if this is documented in the organ donation register, on an organ donor card or in an Advance Care Directive. If there is no written decision, the next of kin decide according to the presumed wishes of the deceased.

### Medical tests, organ allocation and organ removal

If there is consent, the German Organ Procurement Organization (Deutsche Stiftung Organtransplantation, DSO) will initiate the next steps. Professionals examine the organs

for blood type and tissue properties, as well as for possible infections or tumour diseases.

The DSO then reports the available organs to Eurotransplant. Eurotransplant decides which patients on the waiting list are best placed to receive the transplants.

Specialised surgical teams remove the organs with the utmost care. Artificial ventilation and circulatory support end when the organs have been removed. The organs are then preserved. To ensure the organs remain viable, specialist personnel transport them to the respective transplant centres as quickly as possible. Finally, the body of the deceased person is prepared with dignity for a normal burial.

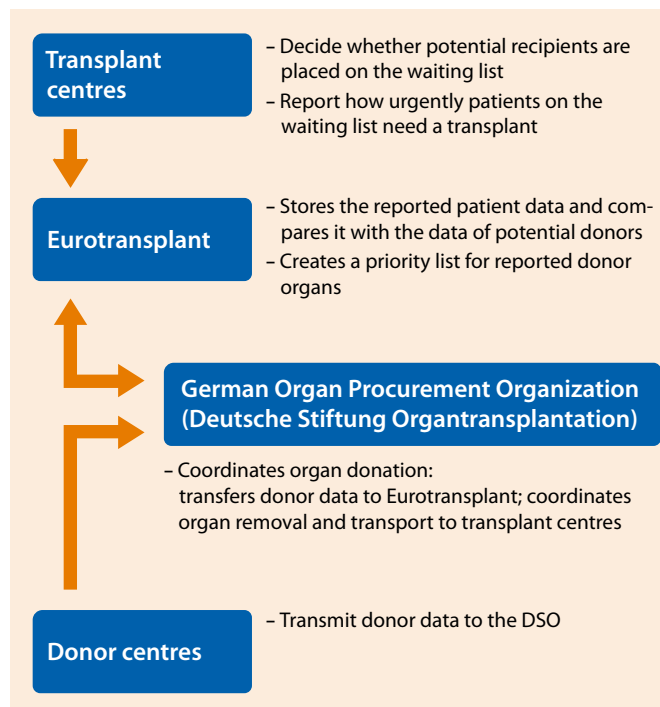


Figure 1 Sequence for potential organ donation



On request, loved ones can obtain information about the success of the organ transplants later. However, the recipients remain anonymous.

## How can I record my decision to be an organ donor?

A conscious decision for or against organ donation creates clarity for you and your family. Document your wishes to relieve your loved ones of this responsibility in an emergency situation.

In Germany, young people from age 16 can consent to organ and tissue donation. You can object to organ donation from age 14.

### The organ donation register

The easiest and most legally binding way to document this is an entry in the organ donation register. This is a central digital register kept by the Federal Institute for Drugs and Medical Devices (Bundesinstitut für Arzneimittel und Medizinprodukte, BfArM).

Registration is voluntary, free of charge, and can be changed or deleted at any time. Your entry determines

- Whether you consent to organ donation
- Which organs or tissues may be removed
- If you reject organ donation.

You can find the register at [Organ donation register](#)

### The organ donor card

You can also fill in an organ donor card. It fits in any wallet. It is best to carry it with you at all times.

You can obtain the card free of charge online, from health insurance providers, many medical practices, pharmacies and local government offices.

[Download organ donor card](#)

### The Advance Care Directive

You can also record your decision to be an organ donor in an Advance Care Directive. The Advance Care Directive covers medical decisions for future situations in which you can no longer decide for yourself.

You can find further information on the Advance Care Directive at [Information on the Advance Care Directive from the Federal Ministry of Justice](#) (Bundesministerium der Justiz)

### Talk to your loved ones

No matter what you decide in the end, let your loved ones know about your decision. This helps them in an emergency and ensures that your personal wishes can be respected.

You can find answers to frequently asked questions and further information about organ donation at 'No excuses for Bavaria' (Keine Ausreden Bayern) – [Frequently asked questions about organ donation](#)

## **A special case: living organ donation**

In addition to organ donation after death, there is also the possibility of living organ donation. It means that a person who is still alive donates an organ or part of an organ to another person.

In Germany, this is only possible for one kidney and part of the liver. In general, people can live well with a single healthy kidney. The liver has the special ability to regrow after part of it has been removed.

A living organ donation is always associated with a surgical procedure and potential health risks for the donor. For this reason, especially strict legal and medical requirements apply.

These are:

- The donor must be of legal age and able to give consent.
- The donor must be fully informed about the medical aspects.
- There must be no health risks counting against organ donation.
- The decision must be made voluntarily and without pressure.



Trafficking in organs is strictly prohibited in Germany. For this reason, an independent commission also checks every living donation. It ensures that there is no financial consideration and that no one is putting pressure on the donor.

Living organ donation is only permitted between people who are closely associated. For example, within the family, between spouses or close friends. A special programme for living kidney donation is currently being set up. This programme helps couples of donors and recipients for whom a direct donation does not work for medical reasons. They are matched with other couples in the same situation to enable living kidney donation.

After the donation, living donors receive long-term medical care and regular health checks. The costs of treatment and aftercare are covered by the recipient's health insurance.

## Legal Framework

The Transplantation Act (TPG) governs organ donation and organ transplantation in Germany. It is intended to ensure security, transparency and fairness, and to protect every person's right to self-determination.

In Germany, the opt-in system applies. This means that each person decides for themselves whether or not they want to be an organ donor. This decision is valid even after death, and must be respected.

It is therefore important to document your wishes. Preferably in the organ donation register, on the organ donor card or in an Advance Care Directive. Inform your loved ones of your decision.

The Transplantation Act also prescribes:

- How brain death must be determined
- How patients are placed on waiting lists
- How donor organs are allocated
- How quality and safety are monitored in organ donation and transplantation.

There are independent governing and monitoring bodies for this. They regularly check the work of hospitals, transplant centres, the German Organ Procurement Organization (DSO) and the Eurotransplant donor organ allocation centre.

If in doubt about anything related to organ donation, there is an independent contact point for transplantation medicine (Vertrauensstelle Transplantationsmedizin). Indications of potential irregularities or violations can be reported there.

You can find further information at [Transplantation Medicine Contact Point](#) (Vertrauensstelle Transplantationsmedizin).

## References

**Bavarian State Ministry of Health, Care and Prevention**  
(Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Gesundheit, Pflege und Prävention, StMGp)

[www.stmgp.bayern.de/gesundheitsversorgung/organspende](http://www.stmgp.bayern.de/gesundheitsversorgung/organspende)

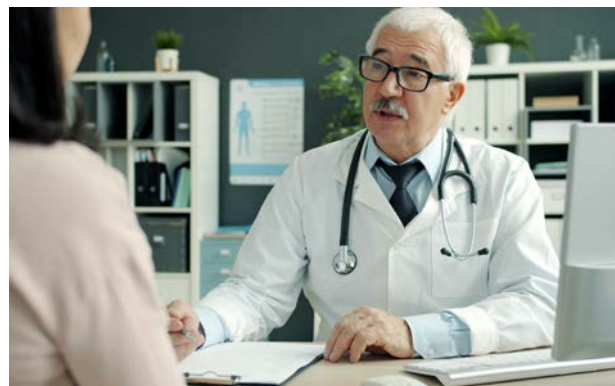
<https://keine-ausreden.bayern>

**Federal Ministry of Health**  
(Bundesministerium für Gesundheit, BMG)

[www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/themen/praevention/organspende/faqs.html](http://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/themen/praevention/organspende/faqs.html)

**Federal Institute of Public Health**  
(Bundesinstitut für Öffentliche Gesundheit, BIÖG)  
**The 'Organ donation – it's the decision that counts!' campaign (Organspende – Die Entscheidung zählt)**  
[www.organspende-info.de/zahlen-und-fakten/statistiken](http://www.organspende-info.de/zahlen-und-fakten/statistiken)  
**Shop:** <https://shop.bioeg.de/themen/organspende>

**German Organ Procurement Organization**  
(Deutsche Stiftung Organtransplantation, DSO)  
[www.dso.de/organspende/fachinformationen/organspendeprozess/leitfaden-f%C3%BCr-die-organspende/materialien](http://www.dso.de/organspende/fachinformationen/organspendeprozess/leitfaden-f%C3%BCr-die-organspende/materialien)



## Eurotransplant International Foundation

[www.eurotransplant.org](http://www.eurotransplant.org)

## German Medical Association (Bundesärztekammer)

### Organ transplantation guidelines:

[www.bundesaerztekammer.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/\\_old-files/downloads/pdf-Ordner/RL/RiliOrgaWIOvLeberTx20190924.pdf](http://www.bundesaerztekammer.de/fileadmin/user_upload/_old-files/downloads/pdf-Ordner/RL/RiliOrgaWIOvLeberTx20190924.pdf)

## German Medical Association (Bundesärztekammer)

### Guideline for determining the death of a person:

[www.bundesaerztekammer.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/BAEK/Themen/Medizin\\_und\\_Ethik/RichtlinielHA\\_FuenfteFortschreibung.pdf](http://www.bundesaerztekammer.de/fileadmin/user_upload/BAEK/Themen/Medizin_und_Ethik/RichtlinielHA_FuenfteFortschreibung.pdf)

## German Medical Association (Bundesärztekammer)

### Who may be considered a potential organ donor?

[www.bundesaerztekammer.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/BAEK/Ueber\\_uns/Richtlinien\\_Leitlinien\\_Empfehlungen/RiliSpendererkennung\\_20250208.pdf](http://www.bundesaerztekammer.de/fileadmin/user_upload/BAEK/Ueber_uns/Richtlinien_Leitlinien_Empfehlungen/RiliSpendererkennung_20250208.pdf)

## German Medical Association (Bundesärztekammer)

### Measures to protect donor organ recipients:

[www.bundesaerztekammer.de/baek/ueber-uns/richtlinien-leitlinien-empfehlungen-und-stellungnahmen/transplantationsmedizin/empaengerschutz](http://www.bundesaerztekammer.de/baek/ueber-uns/richtlinien-leitlinien-empfehlungen-und-stellungnahmen/transplantationsmedizin/empaengerschutz)

## Legal notice

### Published by:

Ethno-Medizinisches Zentrum e.V.  
MiMi-Zentrum für Integration in Bayern  
[www.mimi.bayern](http://www.mimi.bayern)

**Ethno-  
Medizinisches  
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### With funding support from:

Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Gesundheit,  
Pflege und Prävention  
[www.stmgp.de](http://www.stmgp.de)

Bayerisches Staatsministerium für  
Gesundheit, Pflege und Prävention



**Version:** 2026, 1st edition

**Graphic design:** metrik.net, Hannover

**Image credits:** p. 1 Alexander Raths/stock.adobe.com,  
p. 2 iStock.com/pearleye, p. 5 iStock.com/sturti, p. 6  
nappy/unsplash, p. 12 camilo-jimenez/unsplash, p. 15  
iStock.com/peakstock, p. 17 vitality-gariev/unsplash

**Translation:** Dolmetscherservice  
Ethno-Medizinisches Zentrum e.V.

**URL links:** Responsible for the content of external pages  
referred to here is the respective provider.



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