

In most cases, brain death
must occur in order for organ
donation to occur.

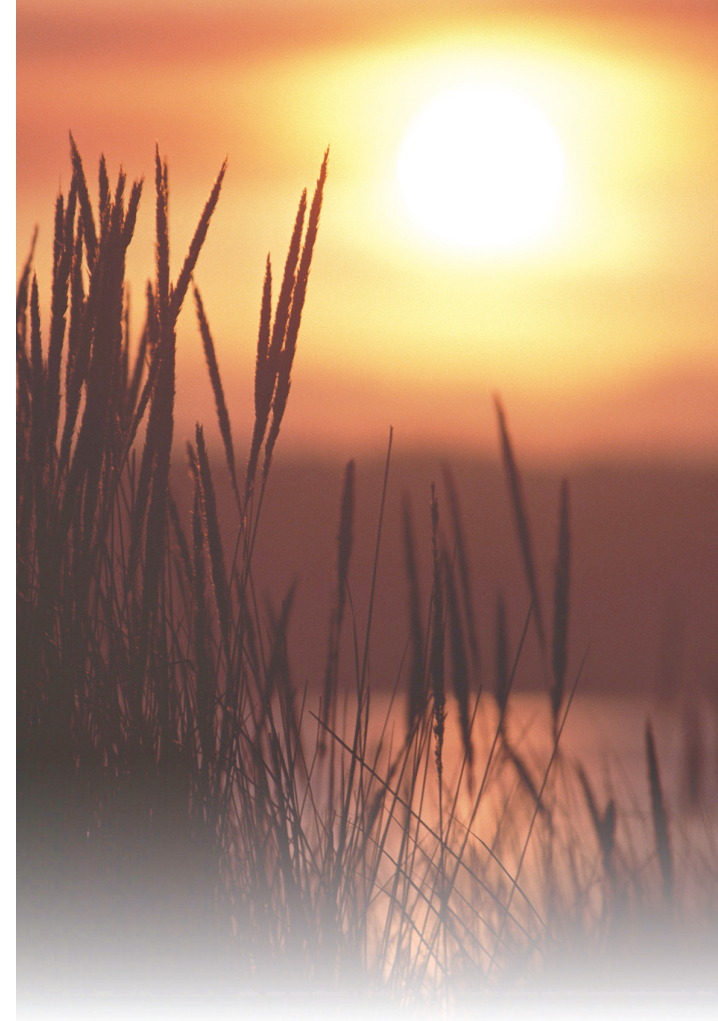
If you have further
questions, please call the
Center for Donation
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A Donate Life Organization



Understanding Brain Death



What is brain death?

Brain death is the complete and irreversible stopping of all brain function. This is caused by a recent insult or injury i.e. stroke, head injury or ruptured blood vessel in the brain that interferes with the blood flow carrying oxygen to the brain.

How do doctors know that someone is brain dead?

There are well defined criteria for brain death. Two doctors will test for brain function. Only when the patient is unresponsive to all tests performed will the patient be declared dead. The doctor or nurse can explain these tests in more detail if you wish.

What are brain reflexes?

Brain reflexes include cough, gag, corneal response, eye movement, response to pain and most importantly, breathing. Some reflexes are from the spinal cord, such as twitching and muscle movement, and continue even after the brain dies.

Why does the heart keep beating if someone is dead?

The heart will keep beating for several hours after brain death has occurred if there is enough oxygen and fluid. Artificial means such as the ventilator (breathing machine) and intravenous fluids must be used in order to keep the heart beating.

What is the difference between brain death and coma?

The patient in a coma is still alive. They will have some brain activity as well as blood flow to the brain. When taken off a ventilator, the patient may possibly breathe. It is important to remember that brain death is not a coma.

What happens when the patient is declared brain dead?

After all brain function tests are completed by the patient's physician and confirmed by a second physician, a note will be placed in the patient's chart by both physicians. This is the legal time of death.

Does the patient feel pain after brain death?

No. When someone is dead, they do not feel pain or suffer in any way.

After brain death is declared, what happens next?

The hospital will make every effort to see that your needs are met. For example, you may want some time in private or a prayer at the bedside with a priest, minister or rabbi. Additionally, if the patient meets medical suitability for organ or tissue donation, you will be offered this option.

Points To Remember:

- **Brain death is permanent and cannot be reversed.**
- **Brain death means someone is legally dead.**
- **A person cannot feel pain or respond in any way after he or she is brain dead.**
- **A brain dead person will appear to be living until the ventilator is turned off.**