

# Cultural and Religious Perspectives on Organ and Tissue Donation



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Culture and religion play a significant role in end-of-life experiences, including how people respond to illness, how grief is demonstrated, what rituals are important at death and which members of the family are present.

Most religious groups endorse organ donation and/or respect the individual's choice. Beliefs about tissue donation vary as some groups may consider tissue donation life enhancing, and distinguish it from organ donation which is more often life saving.

## **Hinduism**

- No prohibition from donating organs and tissues
- Matter of individual choice

## **Buddhism**

- No official position on organ donation
- Matter of individual choice, and of the attitude of each school or tradition of Buddhism, as tied to the concept of "rebirth" and when it occurs. The Southern tradition permits autopsies and organ/tissue transplants, in the belief that rebirth occurs immediately upon death. The Northern tradition believes that there is an intermediate state between "incarnations," and avoid movement or touching of the body for eight (8) hours

## **Sikhism**

- Support a positive stance on organ and tissue donation. Sikh philosophy and teaching places great emphasis on the importance of selfless service to others, and the performance of "noble deeds:" "the physical body is a temporary abode of a person's soul, and it is the soul that is one's real essence"

## **Shinto**

- Either clearly oppose or are extremely cautious regarding organ and tissue donation; families are concerned that they do not injure the "itai": the relationship between the dead person and the bereaved family

## **Confucianism**

- Prohibited from damaging body as a whole
- Traditionally against organ donation, but brain death was formally recognized in Korea in 2000 for the purposes of organ donation

## **Taoism**

- No objections to use of part of body after death

## **Judaism**

- All four branches of Judaism support and encourage organ and tissue donation
- General principle “saving of a human life takes precedence over all other laws,” including the delay in burial
- Organ and tissue donation is encouraged not only “for humanity’s sake,” but also “for God’s sake, as a supreme expression of Godliness, of true, ultimate sharing: a religious act *par excellence*”

## **Islam**

- Strongly believes in the principal of saving human life
- Permit organ transplant as a priority in saving human lives – as long as the human body is respected and treated with dignity, and the sanctity and protection of human life are paramount; a person must give freely and without undue pressure, for the purposes of saving another life or to enable another person to perform a missing and essential function

## **Baptist**

- Matter of individual choice

## **Episcopal**

- Encourage donation

## **Greek Orthodox**

- Support donation

## **Lutheran**

- Encourage donation

## **Jehovah’s Witness**

- Matter of individual choice
- All blood must be removed from organs prior to transplant

## **Presbyterian**

- Encourage and promote donation

## **Catholicism**

- Encourage donation as an act of charity, and as a decision that belongs to each individual and must be made without undue pressure
- Ethical considerations must be taken into account (e.g. no commercialization of human organs, the need for informed consent), and “the removal of vital organs” must not take place “until natural death has occurred and been ascertained”

## **Seventh Day Adventist**

- Strongly encourage donation and transplantation

**Protestantism**

- Respects individual's choice

**Romas**

- As a whole against donation

**Mormon**

- Decision is a personal one

**Amish**

- Consent to donation when it benefits the health and welfare of the transplant recipient
- Reluctant to donate if transplant unlikely to succeed or if organs will be used for research

**Church of Christ Science**

- Opposes medical endeavours including organ transplants
- However individual church members may agree to organ donation

**If your religion states that it restricts the use of the body after death, you should consult your religious leader.**

Organ & Tissue as End-Of-Life Option, 2002

Gillman, 1999

Health Canada, 2000

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