Understanding Tissue Donation

Tissue donation can save or vastly improve the life of the recipient. This beautiful end of life gift can end suffering for people of all ages. More than 1.5 million life-saving and life-improving tissue grafts are used in the U.S. each year.

Register as a donor
To register as an organ, tissue and eye donor in Wisconsin, go to YesIWillWisconsin.com. To register in all other states, visit DonateLifeAmerica.org. Please talk to your family about your decision.

Donor eligibility
Anyone who wishes to register as a donor should do so. At the time of death, medical professionals will determine eligibility.

The donation process
If the donor is not registered through their state’s donor registry, their next of kin may be asked to authorize donation. They will be questioned about the donor’s medical and social history. Donated tissues are carefully removed through surgical procedures under sterile conditions by skilled medical professionals. Throughout the procedure, the donor’s body is treated with utmost respect. Donation occurs in areas that can be covered by clothing, and will not interfere with funeral arrangements - including open casket services. Tissue donation is managed in a timely matter, typically within 12-24 hours after death.

After donation
Family support is provided to all donor families. Information about the general outcome of the donation, grief and bereavement support and information about how to communicate with recipients is provided. Staff will also assist families who wish to learn more about the ways they can stay connected to the mission of organ, tissue and eye donation.

Grateful recipients
Thousands of people are waiting for tissue donation. Donated skin saves the lives of severe burn patients, and can also be used for breast reconstruction following mastectomy. Heart valves replace damaged valves and treat cardiac conditions. Donated bone, tendons and ligaments can repair or replace tissue lost to cancer, trauma, joint disease and arthritis. Cornea transplants provide the gift of sight.

Quality and safety
More than one million people receive tissue transplants each year. Surgeons are encouraged to use a tissue bank that is accredited by the American Association of Tissue Banks (AATB), a professional, non-profit, scientific and educational organization. AATB is the nation’s only accrediting organization for tissue banks. They develop standards, promote ethics and work to increase tissue donation. Their standards for tissue banking are recognized as the most definitive in the world. The Blood Center of Wisconsin/Wisconsin Tissue Bank is accredited by the AATB.
Understanding Tissue Donation

One tissue donor can save or improve the lives of more than 50 people, often many more.

- **Eye** donations can replace diseased or damaged corneas and/or reinforce the wall of the eye to prevent blindness and restore vision.

- **Heart valves** can replace damaged heart valves to improve heart health.

- **Bone** donations are used to restore mobility, decrease pain and to prevent amputation or bone collapse, all from issues such as trauma, tumors, disease and fractures.

- **Skin** donations can promote health and reduces scarring in patients who receive grafts for burns, abdominal wall reinforcement, breast reconstruction after mastectomy and rotator cuff reconstruction.

- **Blood vessel** donations replace damaged arteries and veins to increase circulation.

- **Cartilage** donations restore mobility and decrease pain for patients who undergo joint restoration and resurfacing.

- **Tendon** donations replace torn ligaments to restore mobility and decrease pain.