

Frequent Questions and Answers

What is transplantation?

Transplantation is the act of surgically removing an organ from one person and placing it into another person. Transplantation becomes necessary when the recipient's organ has failed or has been damaged through illness or injury.

Which organs can be transplanted?

- liver
- kidney
- pancreas
- kidney/pancreas (can be transplanted at the same time)
- heart
- lung
- heart/lung (can be transplanted at the same time)
- intestine

What questions should I ask about the cost of transplantation?

- What part of the transplant cost is covered by my insurance?
- How much will I have to pay?
- What happens if my financial coverage runs out?
- Who are the members of the transplant team and what are their jobs?
- Who will tell me about the transplant process?
- Is there a special nursing unit for transplant patients?
- Can I tour the transplant center?
- Will I be asked to take part in research studies?
- Does the hospital do living donor transplants?
- If a living donor transplant is a choice in my case, where will the living donor evaluation be done?

Do transplant hospitals in the U.S. only perform transplants on U.S. citizens?

No. Patients from other countries may travel here to receive transplants. Once accepted by a UNOS transplant center, international patients receive organs based on the same policies as U.S. citizens.

What factors are considered in organ matching and allocation?

Many different medical and logistical characteristics are considered for an organ to be distributed to the best-matched potential recipient. While the specific criteria differ for various organs, matching criteria generally include:

- blood type and size of the organ(s) needed
- time spent awaiting a transplant
- the distance between donor and recipient

For certain organs other factors are vital, including:

- the medical urgency of the recipient
- the degree of immune-system match between donor and recipient
- whether the recipient is a child or an adult

How does the matching process work?

- **An organ is donated.** When the organ becomes available, the Organ Procurement Organization (OPO) managing the donor sends information to the (United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS). The OPO procurement team reports medical and genetic information, including organ size, and condition, blood type and tissue type.

- **UNOS generates a list of potential recipients.** The UNOS computer generates a list of potential transplant candidates who have medical and biologic profiles compatible with the donor. The computer ranks candidates by this biologic information, as well as clinical characteristics and time spent on the waiting list.
- **The Transplant Center is notified of an available organ.** Organ placement specialists at the OPO or the UNOS Organ Center contact the centers whose patients appear on the local list.
- **The Transplant Team considers the organ for the patient.** When the team is offered an organ, it bases its acceptance or refusal of the organ upon established medical criteria, organ condition, candidate condition, patient availability, and organ transportation. By policy, the transplant team has only one hour to make its decision.
- **The organ is accepted or declined.** If the organ is not accepted, the OPO continues to offer it for patients at other centers until it is placed.

How do I get on the waiting list?

To get on the national waiting list, the following must take place:

- Receive a referral for transplant evaluation from your physician.
- Contact a transplant hospital.
- Schedule an appointment for evaluation to determine if you are a good candidate for transplant.
- During the evaluation, ask questions to learn as much as possible about that hospital and its transplant team.
- The hospital's transplant team will decide whether you are a good transplant candidate. If after evaluation, the transplant team determines that you are a good transplant candidate, they will add you to the national waiting list.

How long will I have to wait?

There is no set amount of time, and there is no way to know how long, a patient must wait to receive a donor organ. Factors that affect waiting times are patient medical status, and the level of match between the donor and recipient.

How are organs distributed?

The organs are distributed locally first, and if no match is found they are then offered regionally, and then nationally, until a recipient is found. Every attempt is made to place donor organs.