



All about organ donation

Giving the gift of life

Find out how donating organs can save lives.

The body's organs do incredible work. For example, the heart can pump more than five litres of blood a minute. The kidneys filter the body's total blood supply about 12 times per hour, and the liver can grow back almost completely. Unfortunately, organs don't always work properly. Organ Donation Week runs 2–8 September, and it's a chance to learn how organ donation can transform lives.

Organ problems can make people ill.



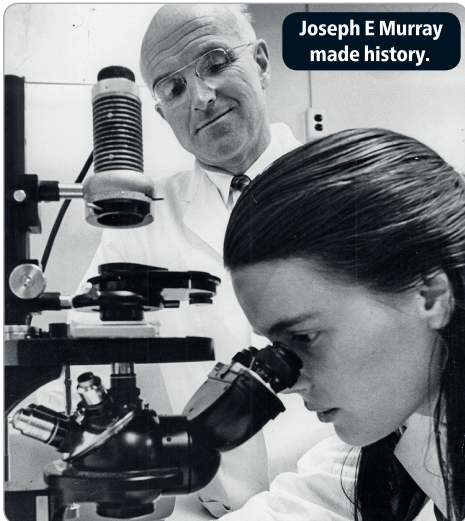
What is organ donation?

Sometimes a person's organs, such as the eyes, heart, kidneys or liver, might not work properly. This can make them ill. Yet it is possible to take a healthy organ or body part from someone else and put it in the ill person's body. This is called a transplant. Sometimes the organ or body part will come from someone who has died, and sometimes people donate organs without which they can survive, such as a kidney or part of their liver.

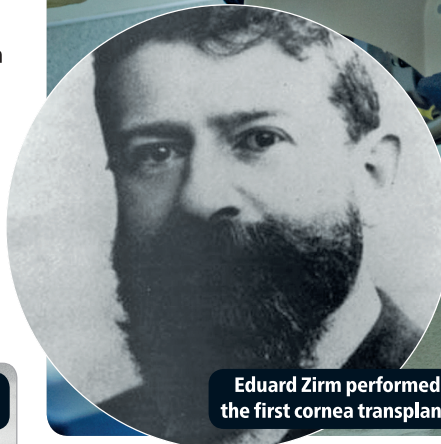
When was the first transplant carried out?

The first skin transplant was performed in 1869 by Swiss doctor Jacques-Louis Reverdin. In 1905, Eduard Zirm successfully transplanted a cornea (the see-through front part of the eye), and in 1954 the first successful kidney transplant was carried out by US surgeon Joseph E Murray.

Joseph E Murray made history.



Eduard Zirm performed the first cornea transplant.



DID YOU KNOW?
Kidneys contain 140 miles of tubes and more than a million filters.



How do transplants work?

For a transplant to take place, doctors have to find a donor with an organ that matches the ill person. Not everyone will be a match. To see if a donor's organ will be suitable for the person who needs it, doctors must look at information such as blood type. There are other obstacles too; there are about 6,000 people in the UK waiting for a transplant, but there is a shortage of people on the organ donor list. This is a list of people who have agreed that their organs can be used when they die to help others. For some people it can take years to find an organ they can use. Potentially, one organ donor could help up to nine people by donating several of their organs.

There is a shortage of organ donors.





Organ Donation

Read the article and then try the following activities...

Hold a debate

The donation of an organ to help someone else have a better life is an amazing gift – a gift that should be respected. So, should we refuse donation to people who make unhealthy life choices, such as smoking? Should donation be equally available to everyone in the hope that people can overcome their bad habits? Should those who have looked after themselves be first in the queue for any available organs, or should it be ‘first come, first served’? And who decides how hard someone has tried to be healthy?

Writing challenge!

Choose one of the following writing warm-ups.

1 Imagine you have had a kidney transplant from a living donor after a long illness. Write a thank you letter to the donor, perhaps saying what a difference it has made to you and how it might affect your life in the future. (You don’t need to include any medical details, just that you have been unwell for a long time and now feel better.)

or

2 Write an imaginary diary entry for the day of your transplant operation. Include how you think you might be feeling, what your hopes are and maybe even any worries you might have.

Investigate

One of the most complicated transplant operations is that of the heart. Your task is to research the very first successful heart transplant (where the patient woke up after the operation) – who performed it, when and where? See how many other interesting details you can find out about it.