

Fact sheet

Donating during life

Blood

- There is a constant demand for blood but less than 4% of the people in the UK who could give blood actually do.
- You can start giving blood when you are 17, generally healthy and weigh over 50kg (7st 12lbs).
- Blood donation sessions are run in centres all around the country. Giving blood takes about an hour.
- You will donate around 470ml of blood.
- Regular donors give blood every 16 weeks; that's about every four months.
- A teaspoon of blood can save a baby's life while still in the womb.
- Donated blood is usually separated into red cells, platelets and plasma and can be used to help several patients.

What can be donated during life?

- Blood
- Bone marrow
- Cord blood
- Bone
- Kidneys and parts of other organs
- Amniotic membrane

Bone marrow

- Bone marrow donations (actually donations of stem cells) can save the lives of people suffering from a number of illnesses, genetic disorders and cancers including leukaemia.
- In the UK people are still dying waiting for a bone marrow match.
- Bone marrow is a soft tissue found in the centre of certain bones. It contains the stem cells that produce blood, and without blood the patient would not survive.
- To be a bone marrow donor you have to be over 18 and have joined a bone marrow registry. This could be one run by your local blood service or another charity-run register.
- Your details are stored on a bone marrow registry and you would be contacted to donate if you are a good match for someone who needs it.
- There are two main ways that you can donate stem cells – either by donating the bone marrow itself during a simple procedure in hospital or by donating stem cells from the circulating blood using a cell separator machine.
- In some parts of the country it is also possible for mothers to donate stem cells from cord blood after their baby is born.

Organs and tissue

- Living organ donation, particularly of kidneys, has increased steadily over the past ten years. One in four of all kidney transplants now takes place thanks to a living donor.
- Sometimes tissue for transplant can also come from a living donor. When a patient has a hip replacement operation, the old bone that is removed can be donated too.
- The amniotic membrane that surrounds the placenta of a newborn baby can be used to heal severe eye injuries. It can be retrieved after birth if a baby is born by Caesarean section.