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## HEALTHY CHOICES FOR MIND AND BODY

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### **Save A Life** *by Ann Gerhardt, MD*

[www.drqsmedisense.com](http://www.drqsmedisense.com)

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**Bottom Line at the Top: No matter how young and healthy you are, make decisions now about organ donation and tell your family and doctor.**

I admit it: I'm biased in favor of organ donation. I like to see our terminally ill heart failure patients receive a new lease on life. I like to know that a person who receives a new kidney can go off dialysis. Someone with new corneas can see flowers again. A cancer patient with a new bone marrow has a chance to finish college.

Sounds like a no-brainer, but in actual practice many functional organs never make it into those who need them, often because the dying individual never specified a preference about donation.

Don't put your family in the position of having to decide, or, worse yet, argue over your organs. Make your wishes known to those close to you now. Even if you don't like your next of kin, tell him or her, because that person will be making decisions over your future dead body. Or bypass the next of kin, put your wishes in writing and specify a Durable Power of Attorney for Health.

The best transplanted organs come from young donors, exactly the type of person who would not write down an organ donation preference. They don't expect death any time soon. Since the motorcycle helmet law, we have fewer donors, which is a good thing for motorcyclists, but has severely depleted the pool of donors.

That puts pressure on the rest of us to consider donation. Even if we are not young and healthy, we might be a perfect match for some dying person. One person's death could mean another's life, rather than two deaths.

Not every person qualifies as a donor, because of concern about organ viability and transmissible disease, but don't second guess your suitability. Let it be known that you are willing. You can even specify which organs you'll donate and which you wish to take to the grave. Let the organ procurement organizations and surgeons decide whether your organs will work or not.

A recent editorial in the NEJM examines the methods by which organ procurement professionals ask families to agree to organ donation. Some are caring and considerate. Some are downright manipulative. By whatever means, they seek to save lives in the face of a dwindling organ supply. Help your family and doctor avoid uncomfortable situations by making your preference known in advance.