

# The Importance of Brain Donation

Brain donation, at the time of death, is the most generous gift a patient and their family can give to research. Being able to examine brain tissue from a post-mortem donor helps scientists discover new ways to treat and cure Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

Most diseases that affect the brain can only be diagnosed with certainty by the examination of brain tissue after death. Many families want to know for sure what condition affected their relative. This is especially important when more than one person in the family has suffered from the disease.

**One donated brain can provide tissue for hundreds of research studies. Thus, providing the gift of hope for future generations at risk.**



**MASSACHUSETTS**  
Alzheimer's Disease  
Research Center

## Who Can Donate Their Brain?

The Massachusetts Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (MADRC) has a brain donation program at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) for people enrolled in our research studies and other patients in the Mass General Brigham system.

Healthy donors - without memory or other cognitive problems - are also welcome to donate their brains. Information from these donors helps identify what changes in the brain are related to normal aging, versus what is associated with Alzheimer's disease or other dementias.

## Is There a Cost for the Brain Autopsy Procedure?

Generally, not as long as the donor has been a patient or research participant at Mass General Brigham. However, if the individual is not a participant in our clinical trials or other specific research studies, the family may need to pay for transportation of the body, and for brain removal and transportation if the autopsy is performed elsewhere.

## How Do I Become A Brain Donor?

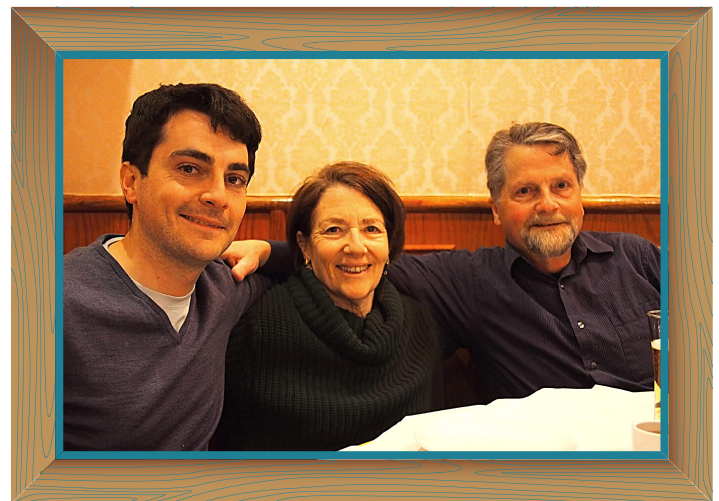
- Have a discussion with your family and your doctor about your intent to donate your brain.
- Request and review an authorization form (this is provisional authorization as legal consent is given by next of kin at the time of death).
- Upon completion of authorization form you will be provided a brain donor card to have handy when the need arises.
- At the time of death, your health care proxy or next of kin should call 617-726-1728. If after hours, press "0" (urgent matter/brain donation). A person from the urgent answering service will come on the line to assist you.

## What Will Happen to my Brain During the Autopsy?

The first step of the autopsy is to make a simple incision on the scalp. Then using surgical procedures, the skull is opened and the brain is removed. After the brain is removed, the skull is closed and the incision is stitched as in a surgical operation. The body is then released to the funeral director, or to the designated person, according to family wishes. An open casket service or other traditional arrangement will still be appropriate after the brain autopsy. The exact funeral arrangements remain the responsibility of the donor's family or estate.

## What Happens After the Brain is Donated?

The Brain Tissue Center will acknowledge the receipt of the donation to the family. The Center will then review the donor's medical history and prepare a detailed neuropathological report including laboratory test results. This report will be sent to the family, and our staff are also available to answer any questions the family might have about the report.



*"There are a couple of reasons why the brain donation was important to my family. Besides the fact that we were contributing to the research into the causes and manifestations of Alzheimer's and other dementias, it was also important to learn the state of Dennis' brain at his death. The fact that he had some signs of vascular dementia was somewhat of a comfort to my son, given that he worries about the genetic aspect of Alzheimer's and that vascular dementia can be caused by many other non-heritable factors."*

- Donor family member

To learn more about the brain donation program:

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