

## The Power of Donors

Registered organ, eye, and tissue donors have a special place in my heart because I have seen the impact that a transplant can have on the lives of patients and their families. My little brother was born sixteen years ago, and he was diagnosed with Wiskott-Aldrich Syndrome at age one. I am sure that most of you are wondering, “what is Wiskott-Aldrich Syndrome?” According to the Boston Children’s Hospital, Wiskott-Aldrich Syndrome is a rare genetic error on the X-chromosome usually passed from mothers to sons. While this disorder almost completely affects males, it is still devastating to those who have it. People with this abnormality have basically no immune system or blood clotting ability. They are extremely susceptible to sickness and must endure all sorts of symptoms, like extensive bleeding and eczema, both of which my brother suffered from. Wiskott-Aldrich Syndrome is most often fatal, as there is only one cure: a bone marrow transplant, and it is not easily accessible. Penn State Health states that bone marrow transplants work by replacing the pre-existing immune system in the receiver by stimulating the growth of red and white blood cells and platelets. Against the odds, my bone marrow was compatible with my brother’s. I was his bone marrow donor, and with my immune system and blood stem cells, he made a full recovery. He is a sophomore now, and he has straight A’s, plays soccer, and runs track. I cannot imagine a life without my brother in it, and I am so incredibly grateful that my bone marrow was able to save him.

What is so incredible about my family’s experience with Wiskott-Aldrich Syndrome is that we had a bone marrow match in the family that was readily available. While bone marrow transplants are relatively common treatments, match qualifications are extremely specific. According to the Illinois Department of Public Health, 70% of people in need of bone marrow transplants to treat bone and blood disorders, like cancer and anemia, do not have a match in their family. This is where the Bone Marrow Registry comes in. People everywhere around the world may sign up to be a bone marrow donor. They receive a testing kit through the mail and send their results back to a lab that tests their compatibility with known patients in need of a transplant. The National Marrow Donor Program, now called “Be the Match,” has a very easy application process. If an applicant is selected to be a match, they will be notified and set the date for their extraction. The recovery time is usually less than a week. It is much easier to help those in need than many people might think.

However, many people are simply not comfortable with the idea of giving parts of themselves away, and that is understandable. What others decide to do is become a registered organ, eye, and tissue donor. The Donor Alliance states that about 170 million people in the United States have registered to be an organ donor. What this means is that upon these peoples' deaths, their organs may be transplanted into one of the 103,223 people waiting for an organ transplant, according to the Health Resources and Service Administration. The HRSA also states that one donor can save up to eight lives and improve the lives of 75 others. While this number is impressive, there are many qualifications and genetic matchings that organs must meet before being transplanted into a sick patient. Traits that must be considered to maximize donor-recipient compatibility include blood type, race, and ethnicity. It is crucial to have a diverse range of donors so that organ recipients may receive organs that are a genetic match, meaning there is always a need for more donors.

It may seem like a confusing and scary process to register to become an organ donor, but registration is actually a very simple process. Americans need only find their state's registration page and create an account, which takes about three minutes. With this account, they can adjust their donor status whenever they please. Becoming an organ, eye, and tissue, donor is not a permanent condition if the donor changes their mind. For others that may not feel secure with using an online site, the DMV can also provide Americans with registration services. It is almost too easy for Americans to become a registered organ, eye, and tissue donor, and every donor can make a difference. The struggle of needing a transplant is affecting many families right now just as it affected mine. After experiencing the impact an organ transplant can have, by learning of my own brother's transplant journey, I hope that you all out there are inspired to make this same journey possible for others. Register today and you will have an unforgettable impact on the lives of many people and their families.

## Citations

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