



**DUKE UNIVERSITY**  
**DUKE UNIVERSITY MEDICAL CENTER**  
 School of Medicine  
**Anatomical Gifts Program**



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## Overview

Duke University Anatomical Gifts Program is a WHOLE BODY donation program. We are deeply grateful and humbled by the generous donation people make for the purpose of educating our present and future medical professionals. Our students include, but are not limited to, medical students, physical therapy students, physician assistant students, practicing medical doctors, plastic reconstructive surgeons, orthopedic surgeons, neurologists, medical researchers and evolutionary anthropologists.

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*Body donation plays a critical role in helping our students master  
 the complex anatomy of the human body.*

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**Our process starts at the time of death.** We provide donor cards for potential donors. The cards inform loved ones and doctors of the intent to donate to Duke School of Medicine and provide our contact information. There is no registration. We keep no records before death occurs. We screen donors after death occurs based on criteria and other conditions occurring prior to, and at the time of death.

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*Our purpose is to serve medical education  
 and support donor families  
 through the donation process*

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We do not facilitate brain donation or organ donation. People who wish to donate their bodies for specific study of a disorder or disease need to find researchers working on that particular issue and arrange body donation with them, as research projects have specific criteria and often have narrow windows of acceptance.

**We do provide cremation** after course studies are complete, but we are not a mortuary or funeral home. We do not perform autopsies nor do we produce medical reports.

**Our facility is open daytime, weekday hours to receive donor bodies.** We are closed weekday nights, weekends and holidays. We try to receive bodies within 3 days of the time of death. We recommend the family find a funeral home or mortuary service with cold storage in case the death occurs when we are closed or unable to receive the body that day. It also gives us time to contact medical professionals to qualify the donor for acceptance and to process the required documents to release the body.

**We keep donor bodies for two weeks to two years.** At the end of the studies, our program provides cremation services. We offer families the option for us to mail back the cremated remains of your loved one or scatter them at a special location in the Duke Forest in Durham, North Carolina. We also hold an annual Memorial Service for donors' families in the Spring/Summer following the donors' cremations.

**There are two costs the family/estate will need to pay for:** Transportation of the donor body to our facility and the cost of certified death certificates. Funeral homes and mortuary transport services generally facilitate the death certificates. Payments for these services must be arranged directly from family or estate to the provider, not through Duke University.

*(See Process and Criteria– next pages)*

## Process for Body Donation at Duke University

**First step:** We recommend potential donors read through this information packet or our website to make sure they might qualify and that our program fits their objectives. Potential donors can fill out our donor card, and give an additional card to family members, health care power of attorney, and alert medical professionals to the donor's desire. Donor cards are not Required. There is no pre-registration. We do not keep information on those who have donor cards. A donor card does not guarantee we can receive the donor body. It is a statement of intention with phone numbers for loved ones to call in the event of the potential donor's death.

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*Please do not send the donor cards back to us.*

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**Second step:** When a death occurs, and the donor and family have made a choice to make a whole body donation, **then call our program at 919-681-5471**, between 8:30am and 4:30pm Monday through Friday. Or call our **after-hour, emergency phone at 919-812-7430**, between 4:30pm and 8:30am Monday through Thursday. We are closed over the weekends. Please leave a message and we will return the call on Monday morning.

**Third step:** We screen for certain criteria that a donor must meet in order for us to accept the body. We cannot verify this information with the donor ahead of the time of death. **Our staff must verify the condition of the body at the time of death by speaking with the medical professionals who worked with the donor up until the time of death.**

1. These professionals may include the charge nurse at the hospital, the family doctor, hospice nurses and or doctors or specialist physicians overseeing their medical care.
2. The family, health care power of attorney or funeral home needs to be prepared to provide us with names and phone numbers of these professionals.

### Criteria

**This criterion is established for the safety of our staff, students, educators, and the body's suitability for teaching.** Criteria may be amended due to specific medical courses and lab capacity.

1. We do our best to receive the body within 3 days of death
2. Height and weight guidelines (case by case exceptions are possible):
  - a. Women: between 100 pounds and 180 pounds
  - b. Men: between 100 pounds and 200 pounds
  - c. All donors must be under 6' 4" in height
3. The body **must be free of infections blood diseases and contaminants** including, but not exclusive of:
  - a. A history of Hepatitis A-E (including Hepatitis C, even if the donor has been "cured")
  - b. All staph infections, including MRSA, VRSA, VRE
  - c. Creutzfeldt-Jakob, HIV, AIDS
  - d. Active tuberculosis, herpes, meningitis, encephalitis
  - e. Clostridium Difficile (C. Diff), Sepsis, jaundice, gangrene
  - f. Open wounds, skin ulceration, large bed sores, unhealed deep incisions
  - g. Ascites or significant abdominal bloating/fluids

4. Other situations under which we cannot accept a body:
  - a. A body that was in medical isolation
  - b. Jaundice
  - c. Drowning, submergence in water at death
  - d. Severe burns, severe trauma
  - e. Significant invasive surgery
  - f. Significant edema in the head and facial area
  - g. Amputations
  - h. Organs removed for organ donation (with the exception of eyes\*)  
*\*For eye donation contact the North Carolina Eye Bank, Inc. (800) 553-9956*
  - i. The body must not have undergone an autopsy
  - j. Pre-embalmed bodies are not accepted, with the exception of a “special embalming process” if the family chooses to hold a funeral prior to donation. This requires our team to work closely with the funeral home.
  - k. Babies and children - we occasionally have circumstances where we can refer to another Duke program.

**Fourth Step:** Once the donor’s body has been accepted, we will fax a **release form** that must be signed by the Next of Kin or Health Care Power of Attorney and two witnesses. The form must be FAXED back to us in order to legitimize the donation and for us to approve transport to our facility. We also need the original, signed copies mailed back to us or sent with body in the care of the transport service.

**This is the legal contract** giving us permission to hold the donor for use in our educational program until cremation. It also gives the family a choice for where to send the cremated remains, or instructions for us to scatter them at Duke Forest in Durham, North Carolina.

Often hospitals, hospices, nursing homes, funeral homes and banks have fax machines.

**Fifth Step: Arranging transportation to our facility** on the Duke University Campus in Durham, North Carolina by the funeral home, mortuary service or mortuary transport service, and possibly cold storage if the death occurs over a night or weekend when our facility is closed.

1. We recommend researching a transport service of your choice ahead of time if you are planning your donation. Different funeral homes and mortuaries provide different services. It is helpful to provide the phone numbers of your chosen service to family members in your planning documents. We will coordinate with the service you choose to help them get the body to our facility. Our program will do our best to refer you to a transport option if you have not found one on your own, but we cannot guarantee the best option for your situation.
2. In the case that we are unable to accept a donor’s body due to certain medical conditions, we recommend having an alternative plan, which may involve the same funeral home or mortuary service that can provide cremation or burial.
3. Please note: Duke University Anatomical Gifts Program **does not pay** funeral homes or transport for this service, **nor do we pay** for cold storage over a night or weekend whether we do, or do not accept a donation.

4. For out of state and long distances we recommend finding an alternative donation program nearby in your community. If the donor feels strongly about donating to Duke University, we recommend finding a funeral home that will make arrangements to fly or transport the body within 3 days of death. This can be difficult if the death happens towards the end of the week as we are closed over the weekend, but we will do our best if the donor meets our criteria.

**Sixth Step: Preparation of the death certificate.** Funeral homes and mortuary services often will do the paperwork for death certificates for a fee, and can help you get certified copies. Our program needs a death certificate signed by the doctor. The funeral home generally provides it to us. We do not need a certified copy. Your family/estate may need certified copies to close bank, credit card and retirement accounts, and settle estates, real estate, life insurance, online accounts, and other legal matters. Duke Anatomical Gifts Program does not prepare death certificates.

**Seventh Step:** We provide cremation services after the studies are finished. We mail a letter several weeks ahead of time advising you that we will be mailing the ashes. Then we mail the donor's ashes to the designated family member or internment site; or we can scatter the ashes in Duke Forest.

**Eighth Step:** We hold a memorial service in the Spring or Summer of the year of the donor's cremation for the family members. It is an opportunity for our students and educators to let the families know what impact the donors have on their education and their appreciation for the generous donation. You will receive an invitation in the mail and we ask you to RSVP so we can be sure to provide enough parking and refreshments for attendees.

**Thank you very much for considering whole body donation to  
The Anatomical Gifts Program at the Duke University School of Medicine.**

Please contact us with any questions and check back with us every two years to be sure nothing has changed.

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