

Writing to your donor's family

As a transplant recipient you may like to write to your donor's family to acknowledge their donation and say thank you. There is no time limit for writing to your donor's family and only you will know when the time is right for you.

Receiving a card or note of thanks can provide the family of an organ and tissue donor with a sense of comfort, knowing that the donation has made a difference and helped others.

Similarly, some transplant recipients report that writing to their donor's family assisted them in their recovery post-transplant.

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Receiving the letter of thanks from the single recipient reinforced that our decision was the correct decision.

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It is important to note that there is no obligation for the donor family or transplant recipient to write or respond, and there is no expectation that there should be an ongoing exchange of correspondence.

The correspondence process

Australia's organ and tissue donation program is confidential. The Human Tissue Acts, Transplantation and Anatomy Acts and associated policies in each state or territory prohibit health professionals and DonateLife staff from disclosing information that might publicly identify a donor or transplant recipient.

Transplant recipients are able to write **anonymous** correspondence to their donor's family via their hospital transplant unit. The transplant coordinator will forward the correspondence to the relevant DonateLife Agency, who will then, forward the correspondence to the donor family.

This process exists to maintain confidentiality.

If you have any questions about the correspondence process, please contact your relevant Transplant Coordinator/Unit for assistance.

Correspondence guidelines

Transplant recipients

Organ and Tissue Authority

(02) 6198 9800 | enquiries@donatelife.gov.au

 twitter.com/DonateLifeToday

 facebook.com/DonateLifeAustralia

 instagram.com/DonateLifeToday

www.donatelife.gov.au



What to write

Many transplant recipients have said they struggle when writing to their donor's family. Some recipients worry that writing will add to their donor family's grief or that sharing the story of their recovery may be hurtful to the donor family.

Please know that this is not the case. In our experience donor families are interested in knowing how their decision has changed someone's life and appreciate hearing from recipients or their families.

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It made a big difference hearing from the recipients and knowing how much better their life has become through my husband's donation.

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To begin your letter or card, you may like to start with **‘Dear Donor Family’** or make it more personal by saying **‘Dear Friend’**.

Use simple language and be sensitive to the feelings of your donor's family. You may wish to say a few words about why you needed a transplant, how your life has changed since the transplant, or you may like to simply say “thank you”. The length and information of the correspondence is up to the individual.

Some examples

Dear Donor Family,

I am the recipient who received the precious gift of life from your loved one.

While I'm blessed with a new life, I am saddened that someone you loved lost theirs.

No words can truly express my feelings for your family.

Thank you for the ultimate gift that has allowed me to live.

I will forever treasure the gift of life bestowed upon me by your loved one.

From a grateful recipient

The correspondence between recipients and donor families is anonymous, therefore it is important that you do not include your name, address or any other personal contact details. Please also do not include the name of your transplant doctor, the hospital where you had your transplant, or any other potentially identifiable information.

Remember to communicate in a sensitive manner. While you may be celebrating, someone else is experiencing a significant loss.

When ending your letter or card, consider signing off with a phrase such as “from a grateful recipient” or a similar phrase that reflects your feelings.

Some people find it easy to write, but for others writing may take time and it may take several attempts to write. If you are finding it difficult to write, your transplant team can help you during this process.

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She said ‘I'll never know you but I'll be eternally grateful.’ And it's just to see that in words is really, yeah it's awesome.

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Sending your correspondence

Please mail or email your correspondence to your transplant unit.

If sending correspondence by mail, we would ask you to place your card or letter in an unsealed envelope. On a separate piece of paper please write the following:

- your full name
- your contact information – email or mobile – to allow staff to notify you when your correspondence has been sent
- the date of your transplant
- the type of organ received.

This information will be used to make sure we can identify your donor family correctly. If this information is not provided we may not be able to match your records with the donor's family.

To ensure that confidentiality is maintained, staff in the transplant unit will open and check your correspondence for identifying information. A copy of your correspondence

is kept on file by the transplant unit and DonateLife so that a copy is available to you or the donor family in the future if misplaced.

If your correspondence includes identifying information your transplant coordinator will contact you to discuss amending your words and can help you with these changes.

The transplant unit will send the correspondence to the relevant DonateLife Agency. DonateLife staff will then send the correspondence to the donor if they have consented to receiving it. It may take several weeks for your correspondence to reach the donor family.

In some instances correspondence will not be sent. This may be because the correspondence contains information that may publicly identify the recipient, if there is insufficient information to identify a donor match, or if the donor family has indicated that they do not wish to receive correspondence at this time.

Your transplant coordinator will contact you when your correspondence has been sent. If your correspondence is unable to be sent they will explain why and try to help resolve any issues.

When sending correspondence to the transplant unit, you will be consenting to this process.

Will I hear from my donor family?

Everyone has a different way of coping with the loss of someone they love, and if you do not receive any correspondence, it may be that writing to you is very difficult for the donor family to do.

Some donor families have said that writing about their loved one and their decision to donate helps them in their grieving process. Other donor families, even though they are comfortable with their decision to donate, may prefer privacy and choose not to write.

In the event that a donor family chooses to write, their letters will be sent to you with the same care taken to maintain confidentiality.

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At times I wish that they would write back but I know that it would be hard for them to do so.

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