

Brain donation is one of the most important contributions to research.

Brain donations from well-studied, cognitively healthy older adults are essential to researchers who work to better understand disorders that affect mental function with age.

Since April 2006, our Center has distributed over 200 brain tissue samples to researchers. Some of the major findings that came about through utilization of this precious gift include:

- In 2006, Todd Preuss and his team showed that certain brain proteins have an effect on the formation of synapses, or points of communication between brain cells. This may help us better understand the role of proteins in neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's disease.
- In 2006, Dr. Chet Sherwood's team found that, as compared to other primates, humans have many more glia, or support cells, in the frontal areas of the brain. This finding may explain why humans are particularly susceptible to neurodegenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's disease and Frontotemporal dementia.
- Brain donations from individuals who maintain cognitive functions at a much younger level ("superagers") helped Dr. Changiz Geula show that these individuals had relatively little of the brain changes seen in normal aging and in Alzheimer's disease.

While major advances have already been made possible through the generosity of brain donation, there is still much more to be learned and a need for continued support.

Understanding the Process

If you and your family choose to donate your brain to Northwestern's Cognitive Neurology Center, it is important to understand what will happen.

- After we are notified, we will arrange for transportation of the deceased to Northwestern Memorial Hospital for brain removal. The cost of transportation to the hospital will be paid by our Center.
- The next of kin will be asked to speak to our Office of Medical Records to give verbal permission for a brain-only autopsy.
- Our staff will arrange for transportation of the deceased from the hospital to the funeral home the family has chosen. Funeral services may then proceed according to the family's wishes.
- The experienced pathology staff of the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine will perform the brain autopsy over the next few weeks. The full cost of the autopsy (about \$2500) will be paid through our Center's research grant. The autopsy provides information about the state of the brain and the tissue is stored for distribution to approved research projects as needed by investigators.
- The family will receive a report about 2 months after the autopsy, detailing the pathologist's findings.

Making the Decision

The decision to become a brain donor requires careful thought and planning. As you and your family consider making this important contribution, please keep in mind that the bereavement period is not the optimal time to begin planning for a brain autopsy. It is best to make arrangements as far in advance as possible, even though death may be years away. There are several things that you and your family can do to prepare in advance.

- Choose a funeral home and inform them of your plans for brain autopsy. This will give the funeral home an opportunity to contact us with questions and ensure that all parties understand are prepared when the time comes.
- Make sure that a family member or friend knows of your intentions to donate your brain. Provide them with information we will give you to facilitate the donation.
- Complete the "Autopsy Intent" form provided at your yearly research visits. This form is not a legally binding document, but it helps to keep our staff aware of your plans and to update contact information.
- Carry the "Brain Donor" card that we provide to you. This will make others aware of your wishes.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who will pay for the autopsy and transportation to Northwestern Hospital?

Northwestern University will pay for the brain autopsy and the cost of transportation to Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

What happens if death occurs at night or during the weekend?

Brain removals are performed 7 days a week. Outside of regular business hours, your family should call our emergency line at (773) 495-2982. The Autopsy Coordinator will return the call within 30 minutes.

Will the autopsy affect our funeral plans?

The removal only takes a few hours and will be conducted as soon as possible, so it will not delay the funeral. Procedures do not alter the donor's body in any way that would affect the option of having an open casket service.

Who can my family talk to about the autopsy report?

Your family may call the Autopsy Coordinator during regular business hours to discuss the report and ask any questions. An in-person feedback session with a clinician from our Center is also available at no cost to your family, if desired,

Do some religions prohibit brain autopsy?

None of the major religions prohibit a brain autopsy, but we encourage you to discuss your plans with a leader from your particular faith.

CNADC

Brain donation is a private matter. Northwestern's Alzheimer's Disease Center respects the decisions of each individual and his or her family. Our Autopsy Coordinator is available to assist you and your family during the decision-making process.

**Our staff can be reached
Monday through Friday,
from 8am to 5pm.**

Phone: (312) 926-1851

Email: memoryresearch@northwestern.edu



CNADC

BRAIN DONATION

Information for you
and your family

*Individuals With No
Cognitive Disorders*

**Cognitive Neurology &
Alzheimer's Disease Center**
of the Northwestern University
Feinberg School of Medicine