

Brain donation is one of the most important contributions to research on memory and aging

Brain donations from well-studied, cognitively healthy adults are essential to researchers in order to understand brain health and disease in aging

Since March 2010 our Center has distributed over 500 brain tissue samples to researchers. Some of the major findings that came about through utilization of this precious gift include:

We have shown that Alzheimer's and other degenerative brain diseases are selective for certain areas of the brain. Understanding the molecular nature of this selectivity will be critical to finding treatments.

We have shown that brains of individuals who maintain cognitive functions at a much younger level ("SuperAgers") have relatively little of the cellular brain changes seen in Alzheimer's disease and even in so-called "normal aging."

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, it is important to understand what will happen:

- As soon as we are notified, we will arrange for transportation of the deceased to Northwestern Memorial Hospital for brain removal.
- The next-of-kin will be asked to speak to our Office of Medical Records to give verbal permission for a brain-only autopsy.
- Following the procedure, 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. The family will receive a report after about 3 months, detailing the findings. The autopsy provides information about the brain. The tissue is stored for future distribution to approved research projects. This way, the tissue is a gift that continues to be studied over time.
- Northwestern covers all autopsy and transportation costs associated with the brain donation process (about \$2500) through our Center's research grant.

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:

- Discuss your commitment to the brain donation program with friends and family, as well as your chosen funeral home/crematorium. Provide everyone with the information we will give you about the program procedures.
- Even though you may have indicated your intent for the brain autopsy on the research consent form, this form is not a legally binding document and consent is always requested at the time of death from the next-of-kin, or other legally authorized individual.
- We will call you every 6 months once you can no longer make visits to our office for an update and to record any changes in plans.

Frequently Asked Questions

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

Research funding covers the costs of the brain autopsy procedures and round trip transportation to Northwestern Memorial Hospital.

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

Brain autopsies are performed 7 days a week. At the time of passing, your family should call our 24-hour line. The Autopsy Coordinator will return the call within 30 minutes.

Will the brain autopsy affect our funeral plans?

The procedure takes a few hours and will be conducted as soon as possible. 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 brain autopsy report?

Your family may call the Autopsy Coordinator at (312) 926-1851 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.



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 at:

Phone:
(312) 926-1851

Email:
memoryresearch@northwestern.edu



BRAIN DONATION

Information for you
and your family

**Individuals With No
Cognitive Disorders**