

ORGAN FAILURE

WHAT IS ORGAN FAILURE?

Organ failure is when a major organ stops working. Major organs all have important jobs to keep the body alive. Each organ counts on the other ones to keep the body working. Advanced illness such as cancer can damage organ tissues and this damage can lead to organ failure.

Major organs that can fail include the brain, heart, lungs, kidneys, liver and intestines (gut). If one of these organs stops working, the patient will not be able to survive without the help of very strong medicines and/or machines.

WHO IS AT RISK FOR ORGAN FAILURE?

Patients with some of the issues below have higher risk of organ failure:

- Just had surgery
- Have an infection in the blood
- Have a disease such as diabetes, cancer or kidney issues
- Have history of heart disease
- Are getting therapy that weakens the immune system
- Have very low blood pressure

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR ORGAN FAILURE?

When a patient has organ failure, life-support is used to keep the body alive until the organ can start working on its own again.

The medical care will depend on which organ stops working. Some treatments may include:

- For kidneys: dialysis (machine to clean the blood)
- For heart: vasopressors (strong medicines that support blood pressure)
- For lungs: ventilator therapy (breathing machine)

If the organ will not be able to start working on its own again, the patient, family and health care team must decide if they want to continue life-support or focus on comfort measures.

YOUR HEALTH CARE TEAM CAN HELP

Partner with your health care team to see what this would mean for you. Your medical team can share the benefits and risks of each option with you. Ask questions and use the information to make the decision that is best for you.