Questions to Ask Your Transplant Surgeon or Cardiologist

- **Is advanced preservation available in our transplant network?**
- **How will my heart be preserved during transport?**
- **How do modern methods compare with ice storage?**
- **How can I have a choice in how the heart is transported?**
- **Can we request that advanced preservation be used at the donor's hospital?**

Did You Know

Time is Important
Donor hearts can only stay outside the body for a short time. Even with new technology, faster time to surgery is always best.

How Technology Helps
Modern systems track temperature to keep organs safe on their journey.

A Great Match Matters
Your heart must fit your body — doctors check blood type, antibodies, size, and health to keep you safe.

Costs and Insurance
Most transplant costs, including organ preservation, are covered by insurance and Medicare.

Feelings Are Expected
It's okay to feel nervous or worried. Support groups, counselors, and your care team are here to help.

A Gift of Life
Your new organ is possible because of a generous donor and their family. Taking care of yourself and living your life honors that gift.

Contact Us

If you would like to receive support or need more information, please contact us at:

The Mended Hearts, Inc.
1579 US Highway 19 S
Leesburg, GA 31763
1-888-HEART99

www.mendedhearts.org

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Shared Decisions: Protecting Your New Heart During Transport

The Mended Hearts, Inc.

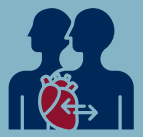
Discussion Guide for Patients & Caregivers

This discussion guide is part of the EMPOWERTRANSPLANT™ educational series.

Preservation Options

The Critical Journey of Your New Heart

When you get the life-changing news that a donor heart is available, a fast and important journey begins. The heart must travel from the donor to your hospital, and every minute matters. To keep it as healthy as possible for your transplant, the heart is carefully protected during the trip. This guide will help you understand how donor hearts are preserved during transport, so you can talk with your care team and feel more involved in the process.



What is Organ Preservation

This is a special way to keep an organ, like a heart or kidney, protected and safe after it leaves a donor's body. Doctors use cold temperatures and special liquids to slow down the organ's activity. This gives them more time to move it to the patient and prepare for the surgery, helping the transplant work and save a life.[1]

[1]Hess, N. R., Ziegler, L. A., & Kaczorowski, D. J. (2022). Heart Donation and Preservation: Historical Perspectives, Current Technologies, and Future Directions. Journal of Clinical Medicine, 11(19), 5762.

Traditional Preservation

For many years, the most common way to transport a donor heart was to place it in sterile bags with a special cold fluid, then put those bags in a cooler filled with ice. The goal is to slow down the heart's cells, so they need less oxygen and energy. This helps keep the heart healthy until it's ready to be transplanted. If ice storage isn't well controlled, the donor heart can be damaged by freezing.

Advanced Preservation Systems

Today, new technologies offer better ways to transport a donor heart. These advanced systems, called organ preservation devices, are a big improvement over regular coolers. One approach uses special containers that keep the heart at the proper temperature and in a controlled environment to help protect it during the trip.
These systems are different from regular coolers. Instead of using ice, they often use special gel or a cooling system that keeps the heart at a steady, safe temperature. The medical team can even watch the temperature in real time. This provides much better protection than the old method.

Observed Benefits of Advanced Preservation

- Improved how well the heart works after surgery[2]
- Lowered the risk of complications[2]
- Helped patients heal faster[2]
- Allowed hearts to travel longer distances to reach those who need them most[2]

[2]Improved 2-year Heart Transplant Survival with Moderate Hypothermic Donor Heart Preservation in the GUARDIAN Heart Registry\Silvestry, Scott et al.
The Journal of Heart and Lung Transplantation, Volume 0, Issue 0

Research

Newer preservation systems have greatly improved heart transplant outcomes.

The GUARDIAN-Heart Registry study[2,3] looked at thousands of transplants and compared hearts kept in traditional ice preservation with those preserved using the newer, advanced methods.

Compared to ice storage, Advanced preservation showed:

- Hearts could stay viable during longer storage and transport.[3]
- The risk of serious complications after surgery was cut by more than two-thirds.[3]
- Patients had up to a 54% lower chance of dying within 4 years.[3]
- 1-year survival improved by nearly 50% for some people.[3]

Your Voice Matters

As a future heart transplant recipient, you have a voice in your care - ask how your new heart is preserved and transported. Discuss with your cardiologist or transplant surgeon whether advanced preservation is available in your transplant network. If you're interested in advanced preservation, talk to your transplant team and ask, "How can we make this happen?"

[3]Donor Heart Preservation at 4–8°C Using the SherpaPak Cardiac Transport System Improves 4-Year Survival in the US GUARDIAN-Heart Registry. 2025 ISHLT Presentation. D'Alessandro, et al