



things to know about VCA organ transplants

such as hand and face transplants.

1 What is a VCA organ transplant?



VCA stands for Vascularized Composite Allograft organs. VCA transplants involve multiple tissue types including skin, bone, nerves, and blood vessels (vascular means vessels) which are transplanted onto a patient.

2 What are some types of VCA transplants?

The VCA transplants that you probably hear about most often are hand, arm, and face transplants. But they can also include the larynx, genitalia, the abdominal wall, and other body parts.



3 Why a transplant versus artificial limbs or reconstructive surgery?

VCA transplants can restore abilities and independence in ways that artificial limbs and surgery can't. These transplants can completely transform lives.



4 How common are these transplants?



As of 2017, about 85 hand and arm transplants and 20 full or partial face transplants had been performed around the world. The first VCA transplants were performed about 20 years ago, but it is still a relatively new, developing surgery.

5 How does a hand or arm transplant work?



The surgery is very complicated. Bones have to be connected to the arm; arteries, and veins must be reattached; and tendons and nerves need to be repaired. The medical and surgical team can include dozens of professionals and take up to 16 hours to perform.

6 How does a face transplant work?

These transplants also take teams of doctors and many hours to perform — how long depends on the recipient's injury or illness. For example, if the mouth and jaw need to be replaced, then teeth, bone, tongue, chin, and skin might need to be transplanted, increasing the complexity of the process.

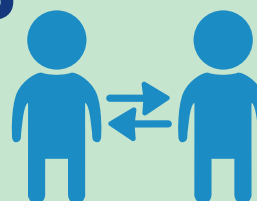


7 Will a face recipient "look like" the donor?

The answer is yes and no. Yes, skin characteristics such as moles, freckles, and scars will transfer to the recipient. However, since the recipient's underlying bone structure is apt to be different from the donor's, any resemblance will likely be minimal.



8 How does VCA organ matching happen?



Criteria for matching donors and recipients in a traditional transplant also apply for VCA, such as compatible blood and tissue types. VCA also requires matching other features such as skin tone, body size, hair color, and sometimes gender.

9 Are there some risks with this surgery?



Yes, there is a risk of rejection, just as any organ transplant can be rejected. Patients will be on medication for the rest of their lives. Rehabilitation can be a full-time job for years. And anytime a person undergoes a surgical procedure there can be complications.

10 When I sign up as an organ donor, am I agreeing to donate my hands and face?

No, you're not authorizing a VCA donation when you sign up as an organ, eye, and tissue donor. Your family makes the decision about VCA donation after your death, so make sure your wishes are known.

