Give the gift of life

One simple decision could save another’s life and save your family much heartache. Most of us don’t like to contemplate our death.

However, if you do – just for a few minutes – you’re rooting for life over death. Decide now to become an organ donor. That way you could give the gift of life to someone who needs a donor organ to live. That way your family may not have to make that decision for you.

Talk to your family about this important decision. And, take an extra step. Sign organ donor cards so your wishes will be clearly known. Keep one card and give the other to family members.

“If you sign a donor card – and inform your family about it – you alone might make a lifesaving difference for up to 75 people suffering from blindness, bone defects, burns and the slow death of organ failure,” explained Ronald Downs, M.D., Elkhart, Ind.

Every day up to eight Americans die waiting for organ transplants. Another man, woman or child is added to the transplant waiting list every 18 minutes, according to the Indiana Organ Procurement Organization.

Realize these important facts:

- All ages, races and nationalities can become organ and tissue donors.
- Donor families are never charged or compensated.
- Donation has no effect on funeral arrangements. It doesn’t preclude having an open casket.
- No major religious group objects to organ and tissue donation.

Remember it’s imperative that family members know your wish to give. “Ultimately your family has to make the final decision,” explained Bernard Emkes, M.D., Indianapolis. “If they don’t know you want to give, they may be less likely to grant permission.”
Additionally, since hospital staff is required to ask family about organ donations, taking care of this important decision yourself may relieve stress on family members during a difficult time.

Surveys indicate that eight of every 10 Americans are willing to become organ and tissue donors. However, many never follow through with this commitment.

If these potential donors had filled out pledge cards and informed their families of their decisions to give, 4,000 people in our country could be saved each year.

Organs remain at a critically low level nationally. However, by one simple act of giving, you could give another a second chance at life.

The Indiana State Medical Association and the Indiana Organ Procurement Organization have collaborated to launch a campaign called Live & Then Give. It encourages physicians to become organ donors and aims to increase the number of donors among the public. Learn more about this program and find out how you can obtain an organ donor card to keep for yourself and one to give to your family.