

Commonly asked questions and answers

Why does my tissue need to be tested?

Body tissue will usually need to be tested in the laboratory. It is examined so that medical and other staff can better understand your condition. A doctor or nurse will discuss the reasons for this with you.

Do I have a choice whether my tissue is tested or not?

Yes. Often, medical staff will recommend that your tissue is sent for testing. However it is your choice whether testing is performed or not. If you do not want your body tissue to be tested in the laboratory, please discuss this with your doctor.

What happens if I want my body tissue / artificial device returned to me?

If you wish to have your body tissue / artificial device returned to you, this can happen whether or not it is tested in the laboratory.

If you have requested that your tissue is to be returned, we will contact you after laboratory testing has been completed and reported back to your doctor. A letter will be sent to you, usually six to eight weeks after your procedure.

If laboratory **testing is not required**, body tissue / artificial device (including pregnancy related tissue and limbs) can be returned to you as you leave the hospital by arrangement with the nursing staff.

How do I request my tissue to be returned to me?

Ask staff to give you the Return of Body Tissue form to complete. Return the completed form to staff.

Can I change my mind at any stage?

Yes, you can change your mind about any decision you have made. You **must** discuss this with your doctor at the earliest opportunity.

If your body part / body tissue / pregnancy tissue has gone for testing and you no longer want it tested, you must inform your doctor to ensure that no further testing will occur.

If you initially indicated you did not want your body tissue returned to you, it may have already been disposed of. However wherever possible it will be returned to you if this is your wish.

How do I collect my tissue?

If your tissue has not been tested and you are being discharged from hospital, please ask the nurse in charge of your ward to organise the return of the body tissue to you just prior to your departure.

If you are having an operation and will not be able to collect your body tissue, you can give consent for a representative to collect the body tissue and take it home for you. Ask your doctor, nurse or midwife about how to arrange this. **This is especially important if you are having a limb removed.** If you are unable to get someone to collect the tissue for you, a letter will be written to you after you have been discharged.

If your tissue is being tested, you will be notified by mail that the tissue is available to be picked up. The tissue will be stored for 14 days after this letter has been sent to you. Please follow the letter's instructions and bring the letter and some form of identification with you when you pick up your tissue.

If you cannot pick up the body tissue within 14 days, you may phone the Mortuary directly on 07 839 8650 to extend the time the tissue will be stored for you. Alternatively, you can phone the hospital on 07 839 8899 and choose one of the following people to liaise with the mortuary:

- Clinical nurse manager of the ward you were discharged from.
- Māori cultural advisors.
- Hospital chaplain.

Please give these people 24 hours notice prior to you collecting your body tissue and they will arrange an appointment to meet you to return your body tissue.

Friends / family / whānau and/or additional support people can accompany you when you collect your tissue.

Note: If the tissue is not picked up within the agreed timeframe it will be disposed of according to Waikato DHB Policy.

You, or your representative, will be required to sign a form when collecting the body tissue.

Note: The people returning the body tissue will not be able to answer any questions in relation to the removed tissue. Please ensure you discuss your concerns relating to the body tissue with your doctor.

Body tissue will be packaged in such a way that any leakage is contained and the body tissue can not be seen or easily tampered with. Because of the packing requirements, the package you receive may be considerably larger than you had expected.

General information

You have been informed by your doctor or surgeon that it is necessary to have a body part, body tissue or artificial device removed.

You have the right to decide whether or not you would like your body tissue/artificial device returned to you.

'Body tissue' includes:

- a collection of specialised cells that perform a particular function
- a body part (a solid mass of tissue that forms a structural unit responsible for a particular function) such as a limb, hair, teeth or body organ
- pregnancy tissue (this includes placentas and foetal material).

There are times when it is **not** advisable to return your body tissue to you because it is infectious, or is contaminated with material that may be harmful. In this instance, your doctor will discuss the reasons your tissue should not be returned with you.

Waikato District Health Board (Waikato DHB) will not generally return body fluids, (e.g. blood, urine). We do not return pacemakers.

How do I store my tissue?

Your body tissue should be stored in a cool place away from food, drink, medication, open flames, children and pets.

Can I handle my tissue?

No, your body tissue may have been treated and stored in a preservative called formalin which contains formaldehyde. **It is important that you do not handle the body tissue or interfere with the container, as the formaldehyde is poisonous.** It is best to leave the packing intact and bury the tissue as soon as possible.

How and where should I dispose of my tissue?

We recommend that your tissue, especially limbs, be buried in a recognised burial site if possible. If you choose to bury the tissue yourself, please bury to a depth that prevents it being dug up by pets.

Tissue can be cremated by the crematorium. You will need to make the arrangement and this will be at your cost. Foetal tissue can be cremated by the hospital but ashes can not be returned.

How is my body tissue/artificial device disposed of if I do not want it returned to me?

For foetal tissue only, there is an option of cremation or having your foetal tissue treated in accordance with the Management of Health Care Waste New Zealand Standards and returned to the earth. Please discuss your preferred option with your nurse.

All other body tissue and artificial devices are treated in accordance with the Management of Health Care Waste New Zealand Standards and are returned to the earth.



Return or disposal of body tissue

including pregnancy tissue,
limbs and artificial devices

For Māori and other cultures the return of body tissue to the patient, or family representative, is seen as valuing a tradition and honouring a cultural practice.

This brochure explains the process of having body tissue/artificial device returned to you.

If it is important to you to have your body tissue returned to you, please read this pamphlet and discuss this with your doctor, nurse or midwife.

You will need to fill out the Return of Body Tissue form. Ensure your address and phone number are correct.

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