



**Rush
Alzheimer's
Disease
Center**



Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Brain, Spinal Cord, and Nerve and Muscle Tissue Autopsy

1. Why is brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue autopsy important?

Although diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease has become very accurate in recent years, a brain autopsy is still the only way to prove that an individual suffered from this disorder. An individual may have more than one form of dementia and performing a brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue autopsy can help scientists learn about changes in the nervous system in persons with memory and other cognitive loss. Brain donation not only provides a definite diagnosis to families, but it provides extremely valuable information to help scientists learn about changes in the brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue to better treat and prevent memory loss and dementia in future generations.

2. What must my family do at the time of death?

Once we receive the call from your family member after your death by dialing **1-866-761-7811** (services in English and Spanish), our team will quickly act to work with the funeral home or cremation group of your choice to coordinate transport of your remains to Rush for the autopsy. The autopsy is completed as soon as the body arrives to Rush. This process will not burden your family.

3. How long does the process take?

The removal of the brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue will take approximately 2 hours to complete. The procedure will not delay any funeral, burial, or cremation plans that are arranged.

4. Will you take good care of the body?

Yes. We know the person is valued by many others. We promise to handle the brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue and body with the utmost care.

5. Who does the autopsy? What are their qualifications?

The autopsy is performed by qualified team members who have been trained by our pathologist to perform the procedure. These technicians are a part of the RADC Rapid Response autopsy team, a 24-hour service that performs brain and spinal cord extractions for local and out of town agencies in need of removal services.



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6. Does the autopsy prevent my family from having an open casket?

No, families can still choose to have an open casket since the brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue autopsy are not evident. The body will not be disfigured or mutilated, the incision for the brain occurs from ear to ear in the back of the head.

7. What are you going to do with the brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue?

The brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue is carefully stored for years so that analyses can be done. Nobody but approved study staff will have access to the brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue.

8. What does it cost to donate?

Nothing. We will pay for expenses including the autopsy, pathology examination, diagnosis, and any transportation fees charged by the funeral home. RADC will not cover any additional charges billed by the funeral home.

9. How does brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue autopsy benefit my family?

A brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue autopsy is a lasting gift for families because it provides a vital record for the family's medical history and enables family members a better opportunity to monitor their own future healthcare needs. For example, early onset Alzheimer's disease represents only a small percentage of cases, but has been linked to several genes and runs through families. The information gained gives families peace of mind as the brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue autopsy can bring meaning to their loved one's death.

10. How will my family find out what the brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue examination showed?

Your family will receive a copy of the pathology report as well a letter from the physician explaining the major findings. Autopsies for dementia are complicated and often require an extensive evaluation; therefore, getting this report may take up to 10 months.

11. Does my family get the brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue back?

No. They are carefully stored for years so that analyses can be done.



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12. Am I less likely to be saved so you can take my brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue?

Absolutely not. Doctors will not know if you have agreed to donate your brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue after death. Also, they are not going to let one person die so that another person has a chance of living.

13. Do you offer Alzheimer's disease prevention information?

Yes. Please ask our staff for information, and they will provide it in Spanish or English.

14. What if I pass away in another country?

We will do our best to find someone to do the autopsy in another county. It is not possible to obtain an autopsy in some countries. If you are embalmed in another country but plan to be buried in the USA, we can do the autopsy when the body returns and prior to the burial. Your family will be responsible for the transportation cost of bringing the body to the USA.

15. What if I pass away in the United States and I will be buried in another country?

We work with the funeral home identified by your family. We remove the brain, spinal cord, and nerve and muscle tissue and then return the body to the funeral home. In cases where it is possible to perform the autopsy before being buried in another country, the family will be responsible for the transportation cost of transporting the body to another country.

16. How can I sign up or get more information for a family member?

You can call Elizabeth Montalvo at 312-942-2260. She can guide you through the process of consenting and can answer any questions you have.