

# The Importance of Brain Donation for Research and Diagnosis

*Brain donation helps researchers understand cognitive aging.*



- Brain donation from an individual who participated yearly in cognitive research during their lifetime is the ultimate gift.
- The Northwestern Mesulam Institute has been dedicated for over 30 years to studying brain aging in individuals with annual cognitive tests, brain imaging, and blood tests.
- Some individuals we follow have neurodegenerative brain diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease, Lewy body disease, or frontotemporal lobar degeneration, that cause progressive dementia syndromes.
- Some individuals we follow are cognitively healthy—that is, they have normal cognitive scores for their age. We also follow “SuperAgers,” who have better-than-average memory for their age.
- By studying the brains of individuals with and without neurodegenerative diseases, we gain priceless information that may one day help us to promote healthy brain aging and combat age-related dementia.

*Brain donation provides valuable information to families.*

A postmortem brain autopsy not only provides valuable tissue for scientific discovery, but—for individuals who suffered with dementia during their lifetime—the brain autopsy determines what disease caused the dementia. Such information is useful if other family members develop dementia in the future or if there is a known strong family history. Brain donation also gives the family a way to potentially help others, which can create a sense of hope and power over the illness that affected their loved one.

