

# Difference Between Autopsy and Necropsy

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## Key Difference – Autopsy vs Necropsy

The two terms autopsy and necropsy refer to the process of examining a body after death. An autopsy is the examination of a **corpse** in order to establish the exact cause of death. Necropsy is the surgical dissection and examination of a carcass for the purpose of identifying the cause of death of the particular animal. Thus, the key difference between autopsy and necropsy is that **autopsy is performed on humans whereas necropsy is performed on animals.**

## What is an Autopsy?

An autopsy is the examination of a corpse to identify the exact cause of death or the extent of the injuries that resulted in death. Specially trained medical professionals called the **forensics** pathologists perform this procedure.

## When is it Done?

- In suspicious deaths
- If the relatives request for an autopsy
- When it is required by law, as in deaths caused by accidents
- In deaths that happen in health care institutions to exclude the possibility of medical negligence
- To study about rare medical conditions (with the consent of the relatives)

If the law requires an autopsy to be performed, forensics pathologists can perform the autopsy without the consent of the relatives. In all other situations, especially on occasions where organs are donated, written consent of the relatives is essential.



**Figure 01: Autopsy**

## **Main Two Categories of Autopsies**

**Medico Legal Autopsies** – Autopsies that are carried out for legal purposes.

**Pathological Autopsies** – These autopsies are not required by law, but are performed with the intention of broadening the understanding and knowledge about a rare pathological condition or deformity that resulted in the death of the person. Permission of the relatives is required to carry out autopsies of this type.

Usually, before starting the autopsy, information about the physical nature of the dead body such as height, visible injuries, clothes and special features (eg:- tattoos, piercings, any deformity, surgical scars) are recorded and sometimes photographs are also taken to be provided for legal purposes when necessary.

## **Techniques used in the Dissection of a Corpse**

- Virchow Method – Each organ is separated and examined one by one.
- Rokitansky Method – In this method organs are dissected as a bloc.
- Ghon Method – This is mostly similar to the Rokitansky method.

During an autopsy, samples are taken from body fluids and tissues for further investigations.

## Negative Autopsy

When the cause of death cannot be determined even after a meticulously done autopsy that is called a negative autopsy.

Conditions which may turn out to be negative autopsies:

- Vagal inhibition
- Arrhythmias
- Epilepsy
- Electrocutation
- Insulin overdose
- Poisoning/drug overdose
- Bronchial asthma
- Myocarditis
- Hyperthermia
- Hypothermia

## What is Necropsy?

Necropsy is the examination of a carcass to establish the cause of death of an animal. This is usually done when an outbreak of an epidemic is suspected, to identify the causative agent and prevent the spread of the disease to the other animals in the community. Similar to an autopsy, prior to the initiation of a necropsy, the external examination is carried out and samples from body fluids are taken for pathological, toxicological and microbiological studies.



Figure 02: Necropsy

## What are the similarities between Autopsy and Necropsy

- The purpose of performing both these procedures is establishing the cause of death.
- Prior to the initiation of both procedures, an external examination is carried out and samples are taken from body fluids and tissues for further laboratory investigations.

## What is the difference between Autopsy and Necropsy?

### Autopsy vs Necropsy

Autopsy is done on human dead bodies.

Necropsy is done on carcasses.

### Legal Requirements

Autopsies have lots of legal requirements.

Legal requirements are minimal.

## Summary – Autopsy vs Necropsy

The main difference between autopsy and necropsy is that autopsy is performed on human dead bodies whereas necropsy is performed on carcasses. An autopsy should be performed precisely adhering to the standard set of rules as dictated by law. All the observations made should be clearly recorded and the records should be well preserved. A necropsy does not require such meticulous procedures and the importance of necropsies lies in the role they play in combating the spread of contagious diseases that are transmitted by animals.

### References

1. Manlove, John, et al. *Simpsons forensic medicine*. 13th ed., CRC Press, 2011.

### Image Courtesy

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