

General Health Care After Your Organ Transplant

It is important to take care of your health after your transplant. Below are areas of health care that transplant patients need to be especially aware of.

Eye Care

Prednisone may cause some changes in vision. Cataracts can form. See an eye doctor if you have any changes in your eyesight such as blurring or seeing halos around lights. See an eye doctor each year for a routine check up. Report any vision changes or problems to your transplant coordinator.

Hair Care

- Cyclosporine may cause thicker, faster growing hair. Use over the counter hair removers to take unwanted hair off the face, arms and legs. **Do not use hair removers for the first 6 months after your transplant.**
- Prednisone may cause dry hair or hair loss. To protect your hair, do not get a permanent or color hair until the prednisone dose is less than 20 mg each day.

Sun Exposure

- Transplant patients have a high risk of skin and lip cancers. Since the risk increases over time, you must always protect your skin from the sun's ultraviolet rays.

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Learn more about your health care.

- ▶ Avoid time in the sun between 10 am and 4 pm when the sun's rays are strongest.
- ▶ Wear long sleeves, pants and a hat when you are outdoors or use sunscreen on exposed skin.
- ▶ Use sunscreen lotion with skin protective factors (SPF) rated at least 30.
- ▶ Use sunscreen lotion and lip balm any day you are outside, whether the sun is shining or it is raining.
- ▶ Be sure to cover all skin that is not covered with sunscreen, especially your face, neck and hands.
- ▶ Reapply sunscreen every few hours and after swimming. Follow the directions on the label.

Skin Care

- Call your transplant coordinator if you find any unusual skin growths, rashes or discoloration.
- Prednisone may cause acne. This often occurs when the dose is high. Clean your skin with soap and water. If acne is still a problem when your prednisone dose is less, your doctor may give you medicine to decrease acne.
- Prednisone or aspirin may make you prone to bruising. Be careful to avoid bumps and falls.

Dental Care

- Anti-rejection medicines can cause infections in your mouth. Brush and floss your teeth each day to help prevent gum disease that can lead to infection.
- Resume your routine dental care 3 months after your transplant. Let your transplant coordinator know about dental appointments. Tell your dentist that you have had a transplant when having dental work done.
Antibiotics should be taken before dental work to prevent infections.
- Notify your coordinator if you have sores, gum overgrowth or white patches in your mouth.

Foot Care

You may be at risk for foot complications such as infection or problems with your circulation. After your transplant, follow these foot care tips:

- Wash your feet each day. Dry them well including between the toes. Look for cuts, scratches, blisters, warts or ingrown toenails. Have a family member help you if needed.
- Do not remove corns and calluses yourself. Have a doctor remove them.
- Wear comfortable, well-cushioned shoes and cotton socks to absorb moisture.
- Talk to your doctor to see if you need to see a foot specialist called a podiatrist.
- Call your doctor if you:
 - ▶ See any signs of infection
 - ▶ Have burning, tingling or numbness in your feet

Alcohol

Call your transplant team for advice. Drinking alcohol may damage your liver, especially when combined with these medicines:

- Tacrolimus
- Cyclosporine
- Azathioprine
- Mycopholate
- Trimethoprim / Sulfasoxazole

Smoking

Smoking or using other tobacco products is harmful to your health. If you are a smoker, join a stop smoking program in your area. Talk with your doctor if you have questions about quitting tobacco use, or call:

- Ohio Quits at 1-800-Quit-Now or 1-800-784-8669.
- American Heart Association – in the Columbus Metro area call (614) 848-6676 or go to www.americanheart.org (click on “Local Info”) for your local American Heart Association’s phone number

- American Lung Association at 1-866-LUNG-USA (1-866-586-4872)
- American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345

Smoking is more harmful to anyone taking medicines to suppress their immune system. It damages the transplanted organ(s) and can lead to an increased chance of infection. It can also increase the risk of cancer.

Sexual Activity

Talk to your transplant team at clinic visits about resuming sexual activity. You may resume sexual activity as soon as you feel well enough to do so. Your sexual functioning may be affected by medicines you are taking and your transplantation. Use birth control to prevent pregnancy.

Pregnancy

Women should avoid pregnancy for at least one year after transplant. Talk to your transplant team or primary care doctor about birth control methods. Talk to your transplant team about your plans for pregnancy so that risks to the baby can be discussed.

Caring for Plants

Avoid live plants, mulch and soil during the first 6 months after your transplant. Many organisms live and grow in the soil. If you like to garden and work with plants, always wear protective gloves and a mask when digging in the dirt or planting.

Caring for Animals

We know that pets can be an important part of your family. You will need to find a new home for pet birds. For other pets, follow these safety tips:

- Do not handle animal waste.
- Do not clean cat litter boxes, or fish or turtle tanks.
- Feces of some animals contain parasites.
- Fungus can grow in fish tanks.

Food Safety

Some food item can carry harmful germs. What may be safe to eat for the healthy person can be a risk for a person on medicines that suppress the immune system. Use these guidelines to prevent infection from foods you eat.

- **Dairy products** – Avoid drinking or eating food made with unpasteurized milk. Avoid soft cheeses like feta, brie, camembert or any cheese made with unpasteurized milk.
- **Eggs** – Eat eggs that are fully cooked. Avoid raw or undercooked eggs and foods that may contain raw or undercooked eggs such as cake batter, cookie dough, Caesar salad dressing, mayonnaise or hollandaise sauce.
- **Meat and poultry** – All meat and poultry should be cooked so the juices run clear. Avoid rare meats.
- **Seafood** – Avoid all raw or undercooked oysters, clams or mussels.
- **Fruits and vegetables** – Use a scrub brush to wash fruits and vegetables, even when you are not going to eat the peel or they are prepackaged. Avoid salad bars. Do not drink unpasteurized fruit or vegetable juices or cider.
- **Keep food prep areas clean and keep cooked and raw foods separate.** Clean cutting boards between cutting meats and vegetables. Be sure to clean counter surfaces well.
- When **dining out**, order meat, seafood and poultry cooked medium or well. Do not eat pink animal meat. Make sure shellfish is well cooked and firm.

Exercise

Exercise is good for your mental health and physical well being. Being active can help to lower the effects of muscle and bone weakness from prednisone and other transplant medicines. A daily exercise plan can help you avoid the muscle and general body weakness that often happens after a long illness or time in bed. Slowly increase your level of exercise over time to avoid strain or serious injury.

Before starting any exercise program, check with your transplant team. They will help you plan an exercise routine that will best meet your needs.

If you are exercising and you have any of these problems, stop your exercise until you talk with your transplant coordinator.

- Pain or pressure in your chest, neck or jaw
- Feeling tired even though you have been sleeping well
- Feeling more shortness of breath
- Dizziness or feeling light headed during or after exercise
- Feeling your heart beats are faster or more irregular during or after exercise

Returning to Work or School

Talk to your transplant team at your clinic visits about returning to work or school. The timing will depend on your recovery and the type of work you do. Most transplant patients can return to work and continue their health benefits. You may need some job training before you can return to work. Be aware that disability benefits are available for a limited time. Talk to your social worker about your concerns.

Travel

Talk to your transplant team about travel. Some places of travel require vaccines for smallpox, measles, German measles or other diseases. Travel to some countries may not be safe since you cannot get some vaccines. Should you decide to travel without being vaccinated, the transplant team will need to send a letter to your local passport bureau stating that you cannot receive the needed vaccines.

Social and Emotional Support

Dealing with issues after a transplant can be hard at times. Let your transplant coordinator know if you need more support. Many transplant patients and their families find it helpful to talk with other transplant patients and families through support groups. Others find it helpful to seek some counseling with a social worker or counselor.

✦ **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.**