



GETTING READY

FOR AN ALLOGENEIC STEM CELL TRANSPLANT

Checklist

Preparing for a stem cell transplant can feel overwhelming. It's normal to have questions, worries, and moments where everything feels like it is moving too quickly. This handout is designed to help you get organized and feel more prepared as you move toward your transplant.

Not everything on this checklist will apply to everyone, and you don't need to do it all at once. Think of it as a guide you can return to over time, in partnership with your healthcare team. The goal is to support you in taking care of your body, your home, and your emotional wellbeing.

WHAT IS AN ALLOGENEIC STEM CELL TRANSPLANT?

An allogeneic stem cell transplant uses healthy stem cells from a donor to replace or rebuild your bone marrow and immune system. Before the transplant, you usually receive high-dose chemotherapy (and sometimes radiation) to remove diseased or damaged cells and prepare your body for the new donor cells. The donor is carefully matched to you using special blood tests called HLA typing.

After the donor stem cells are infused, they travel to the bone marrow and start making new, healthy blood cells. Because this immune system comes from another person, it can sometimes recognize and attack any remaining cancer cells – this is called the **graft-versus-myeloma** response. However, the new immune system can also attack your healthy tissues, which may cause a complication called **graft-versus-host disease (GvHD)**.



MEDICAL & TREATMENT PREPARATION

As you get ready for your transplant, your healthcare team will guide you through several important steps. The following checklist can help you stay organized:

- Confirm transplant dates and schedule with your healthcare team.
- Review your latest bloodwork and required pre-transplant tests to ensure everything is up to date.
- Complete dental checkups, if advised by your care team.
- Talk with your doctor about fertility preservation (your options for having children in the future), if this applies to you.
- Create a comprehensive medication list, including prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins and supplements.
- Arrange your prescription refills and any medications you will need before and after the transplant. Check your insurance coverage and ask about costs, such as co-pays, ahead of time. Ask if your pharmacy has delivery.
- Understand the type of transplant planned, allogeneic, inpatient vs. outpatient.
- Review the risks and benefits of your transplant with your healthcare team and write down any questions in advance.
- Prepare your body for transplant by taking steps to stay as healthy as possible:
 - Reduce your risk of infection:** Wash your hands often, avoid people who are sick, and try to stay away from crowded places. Let visitors know not to come if they have any signs of illness. You may also want help with tasks like cleaning up after pets.
 - Focus on nutrition and activity:** Drink plenty of fluids (about 2 litres of water a day, unless your healthcare team advises otherwise). Follow safe food handling practices and stay active with light exercise, if approved by your care team.
 - Stop smoking or vaping:** You will not be able to smoke or vape during your transplant. If you need support to quit, your healthcare team can help you find resources.
 - Take care of your mental health:** It's normal to feel stressed or overwhelmed. Consider reaching out to a counsellor, support group, or your healthcare team for support.
- Apply for provincial or private disability benefits, if you may need financial support during your treatment and recovery.

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PRACTICAL HOME AND CARE PLANNING

As you prepare for your transplant, it's helpful to plan for support at home and during your recovery:

- Designate a caregiver or support person who can be available daily. If you do not have anyone, reach out to your social worker, pivot or transplant nurse.
- Check caregiver employment insurance options if applicable.
- Arrange accommodations if you live far from the hospital. Ask your care team about nearby housing options.
- Plan transportation for hospital and clinic visits. Note that public transport is generally not recommended for the first four months after transplant due to infection risk.
- Arrange time off from work, school, or other caregiving duties.
- Prepare your home for recovery:
 - Keep a clean environment and minimize dust.
 - Stock safe, easy-to-prepare foods.
- Plan support for daily tasks. Arrange help with errands, meal prep, and child or pet care if needed. Look into services such as grocery delivery as needed.

PERSONAL AND COMFORT ITEMS:

Packing ahead of time can help you feel more comfortable during your transplant:

- Pack a transplant bag with comfortable clothes, slippers, toiletries, phone/charger, headphones, books, and tablet.
- Bring comfort items like a blanket, pillowcases, family photos, journals, or puzzles.
- Download entertainment such as podcasts, audiobooks, music, shows, or movies.
- Keep a notebook or app for symptom tracking and questions for your healthcare team.
- Include gentle exercise items like a yoga mat or small exercise items and consider downloading gentle yoga or stretching classes on a tablet.



Know who to call for help outside of standard clinic hours (emergency numbers).



NUTRITION AND WELLNESS

Taking care of your nutrition and energy levels can help support your body before and after transplant:

- Review dietary guidance with your healthcare team, including safe food handling and any foods to avoid.
- Prepare freezer meals, purchase easy to prepare foods, or arrange meal delivery services. Your care team may recommend avoiding restaurants, as food preparation may not meet the cleanliness standards required for someone with a severely weakened immune system.
- Keep simple, nutrient-rich snacks at home for easy access between meals.
- Practice gentle stretches, breathing exercises, and pacing to conserve energy before and after your transplant.

EMOTIONAL & MENTAL PREPARATION

Preparing emotionally is just as important as preparing physically. These steps can help you feel more supported and informed:

- Discuss what to expect during hospitalization with your healthcare team so you feel informed and prepared.
- Connect with peer support groups or others who have experienced a transplant, if you feel comfortable.
- Learn relaxation or mindfulness techniques, such as meditation, journaling, or guided breathing exercises.
- Share your plans and emotional needs with family and close friends to ensure you have support during recovery.
- Ask your healthcare team about support programs or group activities available through the hospital, especially if you have limited social support.

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Reminder

TOP 5 RED FLAGS AFTER AN ALLOGENEIC STEM CELL TRANSPLANT

After an allogeneic stem cell transplant, your immune system is rebuilding using donor cells. This can increase your risk of infection and other immune-related complications.

Contact your transplant team immediately if you notice any of the following warning signs:

1 FEVER OR SIGNS OF INFECTION

Watch for:

- Fever 38°C (100.4°F) or higher
- Chills, shaking, flu-like symptoms
- New cough, sore throat, shortness of breath
- Burning or pain with urination

i Why it matters: Infections can become serious very quickly after a transplant and require urgent medical attention. Contact your transplant team immediately if any of these occur.

2 NEW SKIN RASH OR SKIN CHANGES

Watch for:

- Redness, rash, itching, or peeling
- Skin tightening or thickening
- New sensitivity to sunlight

i What it matters: These may be early signs of graft-versus-host disease (GvHD) and should be assessed promptly by your transplant team.

3 PERSISTENT DIARRHEA, ABDOMINAL PAIN, OR POOR APPETITE

Watch for:

- Ongoing diarrhea or abdominal cramping
- Nausea or vomiting that doesn't improve
- Unexplained weight loss or difficulty eating

i Why it matters: These symptoms can be signs of gut graft-versus-host disease (GvHD) or infection and should be reported promptly to your transplant team.



4 YELLOWING OF THE SKIN OR EYES (JAUNDICE)

Watch for:

- Yellowing of the eyes or skin
- Dark-coloured urine or pale stools
- Abnormal liver blood test results

i Why it matters: These could indicate liver involvement from GvHD or medication effects. Contact your transplant team promptly if you notice any of these signs.

5 SHORTNESS OF BREATH OR NEW COUGH

Watch for:

- New or worsening shortness of breath
- Persistent dry cough
- Feeling winded with minimal activity

i Why it matters: These symptoms may signal infection, lung inflammation, a blood clot in your lungs (pulmonary embolism), or chronic GvHD. They require urgent follow-up with your transplant team.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Do not wait for symptoms to worsen. Call your transplant team immediately or go to the emergency department if you develop a fever or any sudden or concerning symptoms.

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WHAT IS GRAFT-VERSUS-HOST DISEASE (GvHD)?

GvHD occurs when the donor's immune cells (the "graft") see the patient's body (the "host") as foreign and attack healthy tissues.

GvHD CAN BE:

- Acute: develops within the first few months after transplant
- Chronic: develops later, sometimes months or years after transplant

COMMONLY AFFECTED AREAS IN GvHD:

- **Skin:** rash, redness, itchiness, or tightening
- **Digestive tract:** nausea, vomiting, cramping, or diarrhea
- **Liver:** yellowing of the skin or eyes, abnormal blood tests
- **Mouth, eyes, lungs, or joints:** dryness, pain, stiffness, or changes in breathing (more common in chronic GvHD)

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION:

- **Preventive medications:** Patients are given medications before and after transplant to lower the risk of GvHD.
- **Treatment if GvHD occurs:** This may include steroids or other immune-suppressing medications prescribed by your transplant team.
- **Early reporting:** Notifying your healthcare team promptly about any symptoms can help prevent complications and improve outcomes.

CHRONIC GRAFT-VERSUS-HOST DISEASE (CGvHD)

After an allogeneic stem cell transplant (using donor stem cells), the new donor immune system may sometimes attack the patient's healthy tissues. When this reaction lasts longer than 100 days or develops later in recovery, it is called chronic graft-versus-host disease (chronic GvHD or cGvHD). Chronic GvHD is a common long-term complication for patients who have had an allogeneic transplant, including those treated for multiple myeloma.

WHY IT HAPPENS

After an allogeneic stem cell transplant, your immune system is replaced by the donor's immune cells. While these donor cells can help fight any remaining myeloma cells (the graft-versus-myeloma effect), they may also mistakenly recognize healthy tissues as foreign. This reaction can cause inflammation or scarring in different parts of the body.



WHO IS AT HIGHER RISK

Chronic GvHD is more likely in patients who:

- Experienced acute GvHD earlier
- Had a donor who was not a perfect match
- Had an unrelated donor
- Received peripheral blood stem cells instead of bone marrow
- Are older (either donor or recipient)

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF CHRONIC GvHD

Chronic GvHD can affect many organs, and symptoms may develop gradually. Commonly affected areas include:

- **Skin:** dryness, rash, itching, tightening, thickening, or changes in colour
- **Mouth and eyes:** dry mouth, sensitivity, ulcers, dry eyes, or a burning/gritty feeling
- **Lungs:** cough, shortness of breath, or feeling easily winded
- **Digestive tract and liver:** nausea, poor appetite, diarrhea, weight loss, or jaundice
- **Muscles and joints:** stiffness, weakness, or limited movement



Important: Any new symptom should be reported to your healthcare team, even if it seems small.

HOW CHRONIC GvHD IS TREATED

Treatment depends on which organs are affected and the severity of the symptoms. Common approaches include:

- **Steroids and immunosuppressive medications:** These help reduce the immune response that is causing symptoms.
- **Targeted therapies:** For symptoms that do not improve with standard treatments, newer medications may be used, such as ROCK2 inhibitors (e.g., Belumosudil).
- **Supportive care:** Managing symptoms is an important part of treatment and may include:
 - Eye drops or mouth rinses
 - Physical therapy and gentle stretching programs
 - Treatments for lungs or skin as recommended by your healthcare team



WHAT PATIENTS SHOULD WATCH FOR

Early recognition of symptoms can help prevent long-term complications.

Contact your care team promptly if you notice:

- New rashes or skin tightness
- Increasing dryness of eyes or mouth
- New cough or shortness of breath
- Difficulty eating or persistent stomach issues
- Stiffness, weakness, or trouble with everyday movement

LIVING WITH CHRONIC GvHD

Chronic GvHD can be challenging, but many people improve with treatment and ongoing care. To support your health and recovery:

- Stay in close contact with your transplant and myeloma care team.
- Attend all follow-up visits and take medications as prescribed.
- Report any changes early, even if a symptom seems minor.

With the right management, many patients are able to return to daily activities and maintain a good quality of life.

An allogeneic stem cell transplant is a major step, and it's normal not to feel ready all the time. Your transplant team, caregivers, and support services are there to guide you through each step.

TIPS FOR DAILY LIFE:

- Trust your instincts and report changes early.
- Stay connected with your care team and ask for help when you need it.
- Be gentle with yourself, take things one day at a time, and remember that preparation is about support, safety, and giving yourself the best chance to recover - not perfection.

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