



GETTING READY

FOR AN AUTOLOGOUS 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 AUTOLOGOUS STEM CELL TRANSPLANT?

An autologous stem cell transplant (ASCT) is a treatment option for multiple myeloma that uses your own stem cells.

It allows doctors to give higher doses of chemotherapy than usual to help destroy more myeloma cells. Because these high doses can also damage the bone marrow (where blood cells are made), your stem cells are collected ahead of time and returned to your body afterward. This helps your body recover and start making healthy blood and immune cells again.

The transplant process happens in several steps.



STEP 1:
COLLECTING STEM CELLS

You will receive medications that help move stem cells from your bone marrow into your bloodstream. Once they are in your blood, they can be collected using a machine in a process called apheresis (a procedure that removes specific cells from your blood). The collected stem cells are then frozen and stored until they are needed.

STEP 2:
HIGH-DOSE CHEMOTHERAPY

You will receive high-dose chemotherapy to destroy as many myeloma cells as possible. During this time, you may need to stay in the hospital so your healthcare team can monitor you closely and manage any side effects.

STEP 3 :
RETURNING YOUR STEM CELLS

After chemotherapy, your stored stem cells are thawed and returned to your body through a vein, like a blood transfusion. This day is often called “Day 0.”

After the transplant, the stem cells travel to your bone marrow and begin to grow and make new blood cells. This is called engraftment (when the stem cells start working in your body).

As your body recovers, your immune system will gradually rebuild. During this time, you may be more at risk for infections, and your healthcare team will guide you on how to stay safe.

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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, tandem, inpatient vs. outpatient.
- Review the risks and benefits of the transplant with your healthcare team and write down any questions you want to ask 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).

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NUTRITION & 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

WHAT TO WATCH FOR AFTER AN AUTOLOGOUS STEM CELL TRANSPLANT (ASCT)

After your transplant, it's important to watch for certain symptoms and **contact your healthcare team if they occur.**

1 FEVER OR SIGNS OF INFECTION

Watch for:

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



Why it matters: Infections can become serious quickly after transplant and should always be checked.

2 UNUSUAL BLEEDING OR BRUISING

Watch for:

- Nosebleeds that don't stop
- Bleeding gums
- Easy bruising or tiny red or purple spots on the skin



Why it matters: This may be a sign of low platelet levels.

3 SEVERE OR ONGOING DIARRHEA OR VOMITING

Watch for:

- Diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours
- Vomiting that prevents you from keeping fluids down
- Signs of dehydration (such as dizziness or very dark urine)



4 MOUTH SORES OR DIFFICULTY SWALLOWING

Watch for:

- Painful sores in your mouth or throat
- Trouble eating or drinking
- Signs of infection in the mouth (white patches, redness, or swelling)

5 SHORTNESS OF BREATH OR CHEST PAIN

Watch for:

- New or worsening shortness of breath
- Chest pain or tightness



Why it matters: These symptoms need urgent medical attention.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

Do not wait for symptoms to get worse.

Call your transplant team right away or go to the nearest emergency department if you:

- Have a fever (38°C or higher)
- Develop any sudden or concerning symptoms
- Feel unsure about a symptom or change in how you feel

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