

Hospital and rehabilitation treatment

After the transplantation the patient wakes in the intensive care unit. A liver transplantation is a major operation and demands special supervision in the first few days. The doctors carefully monitor the liver function, if the medicine dosage is optimal, and if any unwanted side effects occur.

In the first few days following the operation, some patients may experience so-called "symptomatic transitory psychotic syndrome." This is a confused mental condition from the after-effects of the anesthetics, which can sometimes be very upsetting for patients. But this is only transitory and is over very quickly.

Already in the first few days patients may be able to get out of bed and walk a little bit. This helps your body avoid losing strength by being bed-ridden all the time. It is now especially important to get re-activated to aid the healing process. Doctors, nurses and physical therapists will all assist patients in their exercises to strengthen their muscles and circulation. They also instruct patients on how to take their new medicines.

Since the new liver is a "foreign" organ, your body will naturally try to reject it with your own immune system. To prevent this from happening, medicines are necessary to block your immune system (= anti-rejection medicines). These must be taken regularly and on time. Directly after the transplantation, rejection reactions are often seen in many patients, which must be controlled by stronger doses of medicine.

It is not recommended to try to return to your daily routine immediately after leaving the hospital. There is a strong danger that the exertions could be too much too soon, which could impede one's healing process. A follow-up treatment in a rehabilitation clinic offers the opportunity to work on restoring one's health under medical supervision.

Life afterwards

A liver transplantation is not over with the operation. A transplantation's after treatment in fact lasts the rest of your life. At the beginning blood tests are made regularly and often – later usually once a month – to carefully monitor the anti-rejection drugs' level and to spot any liver problems very early.

More than ever, now you the patient have to assume responsibility to maintain your health. Due to the anti-rejection drugs – especially in the first year – one must avoid any possible sources of infection. Some side effects of the medicine may be successfully treated. A healthy life style helps ensure your success.

A successful liver transplantation makes it possible to return to your daily life, start working, and lead a high-quality life again.

Ulrich Kraus

Translated by Dennis Phillips

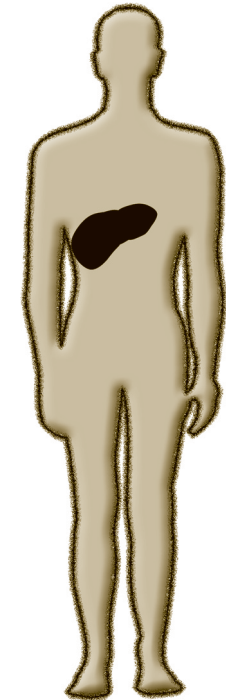
**Other patient information brochures cover:
Transplantation Aftercare, TIPS, Waiting time,
MELD, Alcohol-related liver cirrhosis,
Trips and LTx, Family members, etc.
We're happy to help you.**

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Liver Transplantation

Information for Patients **Liver Transplantation**



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Reasons for a liver transplantation

In the end stage of serious liver disease, liver transplantation is a proven and life-saving operation today that helps heal many patients.

The liver, as a metabolic organ, has many functions. But there are also many things that can harm it, including:

- Hepatitis (B & C),
- Autoimmune hepatitis,
- Cholangitis (bile ducts) liver diseases, e.g. PBC or PSC,
- Metabolic disorders, e.g. Morbus Wilson or hemochromatosis
- Other genetic illnesses e.g. cystic fibrosis or polycystic liver
- Liver tumors
- Poisons and alcohol

Many of these diseases or harmful actions over time can damage the liver tissue and lead to liver cirrhosis. Some of these causes – especially poison – can damage the liver very suddenly.

Signs of advanced liver disease are: continual tiredness and fatigue, certain changes to your skin, accumulation of water in the stomach area (ascites), varicose veins in the thorax (esophagus), and temporary brain disruptions (hepatic encephalopathy).

Any decision to treat a liver disease with medicines, or if a smaller operation, e.g. a stent implant, would help, or even whether a liver transplantation is necessary, must be made by experienced medical doctors. In light of the limited number of donated organs, the liver disease must be so far advanced that, without a transplantation, the patient's life would be threatened.

The decision for a liver transplantation

To determine if conditions are met for a liver transplantation, i.e. if the illness has progressed so that it necessitates such an operation, and to make sure there are no counter indicators, every patient is first admitted to a transplantation center to get a complete picture of their condition prior to such a serious operation.

Not only is the stage of the liver disease and its various symptoms determined, but patients are really "put to the test." In preparation for the operation, doctors must first determine a patient's exact state of health. This may require up to two weeks of examinations and tests at the clinic. Finally, relying on the "allocation guidelines", first then can it be determined if the patient will be added to the waiting list for a liver transplantation.

When you're a patient in this situation, you should inform yourself about the disease and the transplantation operation. It is important that the doctors do not make a decision for you. It should be very clear that a liver transplantation is your very own personal decision, and you should very consciously decide for it! This makes it easier for you to summon the strength necessary for such an operation.

Waiting for a liver

In order to transplant a liver, a donor prior to their death must specify that their organs may be donated after their death. But the number of patients needing a liver transplantation is considerably higher than the number of donated organs. Thus once a patient has decided for a transplantation, then they have to wait. How long it takes depends both on the seriousness of their illness and on their blood type.

During this waiting period, it is important to be reachable by the transplant center, 24/7, e.g. via a cell phone, since once an organ donor dies, the transplantation must be carried out within the shortest time possible.

Inform the transplant center about any significant change in your health!

The waiting time is one of uncertainty, as you can be suddenly called from one's daily routine by the transplant center. In addition, some patients have a problem with the thought that they are benefiting from someone else's death. Critical and sometimes sensationalist press reports may speculate on whether an organ donor was really dead. Patients should therefore be informed ahead of time about the concept of "brain dead" and the topic of organ donation to avoid uncertainties later.

Another possibility today for organ donors is a living donation, which means donating half of someone's own liver. One-half of a healthy liver can function quite well in another person.

In such a case, one can set the date for the transplantation, thus eliminating the waiting period. But a living donor is only allowed in very specific cases.

The liver transplantation

Eventually the transplant center calls the patient to come in for the operation. The patient then gets to the clinic as soon as possible. Even then transplant preparations are being made in parallel both for the recipient and the donor. Sometimes that can lead to a situation where, only after arriving at the hospital, it first becomes evident the donor organ may be damaged and unfit for transplantation. If the waiting patient then has to be sent back home, that may be discouraging. But it is necessary since only a good organ can help the receiving patient.

If a suitable organ is available, first come the operation preparations, then anesthesia and the transplantation, which usually takes four to eight hours.