

Chapter 3: Returning to Normal Activities

Your Diet

Important

After your transplant it is important to make lifestyle changes so can live a heart healthy lifestyle. This includes:

- exercise
- healthful diet
- weight control.

Maintain a healthy body weight

Being a healthy weight helps to control your blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose levels. It also lowers your risk of developing transplant heart disease.

What is a healthy weight?

Men should weigh 106 pounds for the first 5 feet. Then add 6 pounds for each inch. For example, a man who is 5 feet 11 inches tall should weigh 172 pounds.

Women should weigh 105 pounds for the first 5 feet. Then add 5 pounds for each inch. For example, a woman who is 5 feet 7 inches tall should weigh 140 pounds.

The body mass index (BMI) is a measure of body fat based on height and weight. The results tell if you are underweight, normal, overweight or obese.

According to the National Institutes of Health, BMI ranges are:

- normal: 18.5 to 24.9
- overweight: 25 to 29.9
- obese: 30 and over.

Medicine may increase your appetite

Even if your weight was not a problem in the past, having an increased appetite is a common side effect of prednisone. You may find yourself feeling hungry more often and eating more than you realize.

If your weight starts to slowly increase, you are eating too much. Prednisone alone has no calories. It is what you eat while taking prednisone that is causing the weight gain. To avoid weight gain:

- Eat smaller portions.
- Eat less often.
- Avoid eating foods that are high in calories (such as sweets, desserts and extra fats).
- Try to eat only when you are hungry, not out of habit.
- Get enough exercise.

Limit cholesterol and fats

Cholesterol and saturated fats are found in animal products such as meats, dairy products and eggs. Saturated fats raise your blood cholesterol more than anything else in your diet.

Limiting foods like butter, cheese, whole milk, ice cream and fatty meats will lower your blood cholesterol level and your risk of developing heart disease.

Eat foods low in fat to help control your weight.

Limit sodium (salt)

Eating foods low in sodium will help control your blood pressure. It will also help keep your body from holding (retaining) extra fluid. As a result, your heart will not have to work as hard.

Avoid eating salty foods and do not add salt to your food.

It is important to make — and stick with — these changes to decrease your risk of long-term problems.

A dietitian can meet with you to talk about how to plan your meals. Please call the transplant office to set up an appointment.

General Health Care

Yearly physical exams

Get a complete physical exam by your regular doctor once a year. This exam is important so your doctor can check your overall health and find any developing problems.

Your regular transplant clinic checkups focus on transplant-related problems. They should not replace a complete physical exam.

Dental care

Brush and floss your teeth every day. If you have dentures, follow a routine cleaning practice.

See your dentist every 6 months for checkups and cleanings. Gum disease and mouth infections can turn into more serious infections.

Before you go to the dentist — even for a routine checkup — you need to take an antibiotic (medicine) to prevent any bacteria (germs) from turning into an infection.

Your dentist or transplant coordinator can prescribe an antibiotic. If it is the dentist, please check with the transplant office to see if it is compatible with your immunosuppressive medicines.

Eye exams

Schedule an exam with your ophthalmologist (eye doctor) within the first year after transplant. Have regular eye exams every year after that.

Immunosuppressive medicines may cause problems for your eyes:

- cataracts (cloudy lenses)
- certain infections that can cause serious changes in the retina.

Tell your eye doctor the names of the medicines you are taking.

Cancer Screening

The immunosuppressive medicines put you at a greater risk for developing cancer. For this reason, you should have regular preventive cancer screening:

Screening	Guidelines
skin cancer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> men and women: every year
prostate and testicular cancer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> men: every year
colon and rectal cancer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> men and women: every year with a colonoscopy every 5 years (starting at age 50)
cervical cancer (Pap smear and pelvic exam)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> women: every year starting at the age of 18 or when becoming sexually active women who have had hysterectomies: every year
breast cancer (mammogram)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> women: mammogram every year starting at age 40
<p>If you have a personal or family history of cancer, you may need to have routine screening more often. Talk with your doctor about what is right for you.</p>	

Source: Journal of Heart & Lung Transplant

Immunizations (Shots)

There are vaccines available to protect you from common diseases and illnesses. Call the transplant office before you receive any vaccination. The recommended schedule for the following vaccines:

Vaccine	Age/How Often
Influenza	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> every year
Tetanus booster (Td)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> booster every 10 years replace one routine Td booster with Tdap regardless of when the last Td was given
Pneumonia (PPSV23)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pneumovax®: every 5 years Prevnar 13®: one time

Source: Allina Health

Important

If you become exposed to any disease that can be spread, such as chickenpox, measles or mumps, call your transplant coordinator.

After your transplant you should not receive any “live vaccine” such as chickenpox and the oral polio vaccine. These “live vaccines” may lead to a serious infection in people who take immunosuppressive medicines.

If you have a family member who receives a “live vaccine,” it is possible for you to be exposed to an infection through close contact with that person for up to six weeks after the shot.

Call the transplant office for directions on how to protect yourself.

Travel

Travel in the United States is safe. You may travel to the following areas as long as you avoid side trips in areas that are not located near major cities:

- Mexico (Do not drink tap water.)
- Caribbean
- Europe.

Important: Do not eat raw fish anywhere. Peel all fruit before you eat it.

Call your local international travel clinic if you are planning on traveling outside of the U.S. Call as soon as you know your travel plans. Call your transplant coordinator to let him or her know about your travel plans.

Someone from the travel clinic will talk with you about shots you may need and how to avoid infection.

Check with your insurance provider to see if your travel clinic visit is covered.

Skin Care

Acne and dry skin are the two most common skin problems in people who have heart transplants. They are both side effects of prednisone. Both conditions should start to clear as your dose is reduced.

Acne

To treat acne:

- You may wash the areas of acne with an antibacterial soap.
- You may use any benzoyl peroxide solution. (Oxy-10[®] is one example.)
- See a dermatologist if you have severe acne.

To prevent infection:

- Do not pick or touch the acne or pimples.
- Call your regular doctor if you have any areas that look like they may be infected.
- The acne should clear as your prednisone dose is decreased.

Dry skin

Dry, thin, fragile skin can also be a problem. Use gentle soaps for bathing and lotions that do not contain alcohol.

Hair Care

Some of the medicines you are taking may affect your hair. Some medicines may cause hair loss. Switch to a gentle soap to help slow hair loss.

Other medicines can cause hair to grow fast. This may cause unwanted hair on your face, chest, back or arms. To treat unwanted hair, you may try the following.

- Try a 50 percent peroxide solution to bleach your hair. This will make it less noticeable. Avoid the area near your eyes.
- Try a mild depilatory cream. Use caution since many of these ointments can cause injury to your skin.
- Try laser hair removal. Check with your transplant coordinator first if you choose this option.

Sun Precautions

There are increased cases of skin cancer in all transplant patients. For that reason, it is important for you to limit the amount of sun exposure you receive. If found and treated early, most skin cancers can be cured.

Take the following steps to stay ahead of skin cancer.

After your transplant, see a dermatologist (skin doctor) within 6 months

If you do not have a dermatologist, talk with your regular doctor or transplant coordinator. To find a board-certified specialist near you, go to allinahealth.org.

You should see a dermatologist every 6 months. The sooner you have a full skin exam the better.

Be alert to any changes in your skin

Finding changes early makes a difference.

- Look at your skin regularly.
- Please note any change in existing or new skin growths.
- Changes could include sores or darkening of pigmentation (skin coloring).
- Call your regular doctor if you notice any changes or if you have any concerns.

Apply sunscreen often

- Wear sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30 all year.
- Apply it to your ears, lips and hands.
- Apply about 30 minutes before going out during the day and re-apply every two hours. Make sure you re-apply if you are sweating from activities or swimming.

Protect yourself from the sun

- Never sunbathe. Find shady areas.
- Wear hats with brims.
- Wear clothing with close-weave fabric. Wear lightweight long-sleeved shirts and long pants, if possible.
- Never use tanning beds.
- Avoid sun exposure during the sun's peak hours of 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
- Avoid light-reflecting surfaces, including snow.

There are two major types of ultraviolet rays that radiate from the sun: UVA and UVB. The UVA rays, which will pass through glass — even car windows — are not affected by PABA-type sunblocks.

Use “broad spectrum” or “complete blocker” sunscreens with an SPF of at least 30. These protect against both UVA and UVB rays.

Alcohol

Having alcohol on rare occasions is OK, but it is best to not drink at all. Try to not have more than one glass at a time, not more than once a week. If you have a history of alcohol dependence, you cannot drink.

Alcohol may affect cyclosporine and Prograf absorption, which could cause side effects or rejection. Cyclosporine or Prograf doses cannot be increased to cover up binges.

It is important to talk with your transplant coordinator and doctor about your alcohol use.

Tobacco Use

Did You Know?

Using your surgery as a motivator to quit tobacco increases your success rate of quitting for good.

Stay with your tobacco-free life. As you continue to recover from surgery, you may notice your body healing in many ways. Take into account how many healing changes you have from not using tobacco.

Using tobacco increases your risk of the following after surgery:

- heart problems (complications)
- lung problems such as pneumonia
- infections such as an infection of your surgery site (incision)
- blood clots
- slower healing of your surgery site
- higher levels of pain and more problems with pain control.

Tobacco use keeps oxygen from reaching your surgery site and it can increase your recovery time.

Avoiding a relapse

- Think about what you are gaining from quitting tobacco, instead of focusing on what you've given up. For example, "It's easier to play with my kids or grandkids."
- Have a plan for how you will deal with unexpected urges. (Take a walk, make a call.)
- Think your way through difficult situations ahead of time whenever you can.
- Think about past quitting attempts and what was helpful to you. Reuse them again if possible or try something new.
- Explore ways to move your body with safe and realistic expectations. Increasing your physical activity can help you manage weight gain and work through emotions that otherwise would make you want to smoke.
- Avoid foods high in calories and fat. Sugar can increase cravings to smoke. Limit large amounts of sugar.
- Drink lots of water. Ice water may be helpful in getting rid of a craving.
- Reward yourself when you reach milestones: 1 day, 1 week, 2 weeks, 1 month, etc.
- Go to places where you cannot use tobacco. Stay away from the places you used to use tobacco.
- Think about the money you saved!
- Think of quitting as an act of love — for those you care about and for yourself!

Sexual Issues

Tip

Follow your doctor's directions until your incision has healed.

Resuming sexual activity

One major concern many patients have is when they can resume sexual activity. In general, if you can walk up a flight of stairs without problems, you may have sexual activity.

You may find that some of the medicines, as well as your own emotional responses to your transplant, may affect your sex life. If you are having problems, please talk about it at your clinic visits. Treatment is available.

Birth control

When you resume sexual activity, use birth control to avoid an unplanned pregnancy right after the transplant.

- Barrier methods of birth control are most often recommended. These include condoms, diaphragms, and spermicidal jellies. Condoms can help prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Follow package directions.
- Women can take low-dose oral contraception (“the pill”). The pill can increase your risk for blood clots, heart disease, depression, high blood pressure and stomach problems. The pill does not prevent against STIs. Follow package directions.

Important: The pill, ORTHO EVRA® patch, and the NuvaRing® may affect how well your medicines work. Talk with your cardiologist or transplant coordinator **before** you start any of these birth control methods.

Pregnancy after surgery

If you want to have children after a heart transplant, it is possible. You will need special medical care, planning and close follow-up.

Before you get pregnant, talk with your cardiologist, OB/GYN and transplant coordinator. You should have:

- stable immunosuppression levels
- no heart or kidney problems
- normal blood pressure or high blood pressure that is under control
- normal blood glucose levels or diabetes that is under control
- overall good health.

For more information

To learn more, contact:

- your health care team
- the National Transplantation Pregnancy Registry at 1-877-955-6877.

Emotional Changes

Tip

Free one-on-one counseling is also available through the chaplain, social worker or both.

Although you are excited to go home, you may be feeling some anxiety. This is normal. Some of the changes you may face include:

- becoming confident in your new heart
- coping with actual or potential rejection episodes
- getting used to changes in how you look
- having emotional ups and downs
- learning how to live “healthy” and “well” again.

During the weeks after you return home, it is common to feel some emotional letdown. The joy of the initial period can fade while you are going through your readjustment.

The changes in family dynamics that come with this process can cause stress and make communication more difficult. For this reason, please consider joining the post-transplant support group.

Hearing that you are not alone in what you are going through, and that others struggle with similar issues, are important in your recovery and rediscovering the joy of a full life.

Returning to Work or School

Did You Know

A heart transplant is not listed as a “disabling condition” by most government or private insurance providers.

After your heart transplant, your goals are:

- better health
- positive attitude
- involvement in activities.

For example, many people find that their jobs are important ways to describe their self-worth. This may include taking care of their children, doing housework, volunteering, going to school, working at a job, or doing a hobby. Your activity choices will help restore your body and mind.

Your transplant team can help you return to your former activities, including work or school.

Returning To Your Regular Doctor

It is important to keep in contact with your regular doctor or health care provider between transplant clinic visits.

Please see your regular doctor to check the following:

- listen to your lungs and heart
- check your blood pressure, temperature, pulse
- review your medicines
- have lab work.

Be sure to tell the transplant staff if you change doctors or clinics, or if your doctor's address or phone number changes.

When you see your doctor on a regular basis, he or she can more easily find issues with your health. He or she can give you annual screenings and be a good resource for health care issues other than with your heart.