

## **Nutrition**

### *For liver transplant patients*

Eating the right foods is very important as you prepare for liver transplant, during your recovery, and for the rest of your life. To help you learn about good nutrition, you will meet with transplant dietitians before and after your surgery.

### **Nutrition Before Transplant Surgery**

Before transplant, be sure to follow the dietary guidelines your dietitian gives you. Eating the right foods will help you be in the best health possible. This will help your body handle the surgery and heal afterward.



*You will meet with transplant dietitians both before and after your transplant surgery.*

### **Nutrition After Transplant Surgery**

After transplant, good nutrition will help you:

- Heal and fight infection
- Keep your desired weight
- Reduce some of the side effects of the medicines you must take after your transplant

Your dietitian will monitor your food intake after surgery and will teach you how to meet your nutritional needs. This will include tips to help you choose foods from the hospital menu.

Your most important priorities for your diet after transplant are to:

- Eat enough calories and protein to support healing and build muscle
- Drink enough fluids
- Follow the food safety guidelines

## Your Weight

During the first few weeks after transplant, do not worry about your weight. It will be hard to know your actual weight, since you may retain water after surgery. Once you are eating well and meeting your protein needs, your dietitian will talk with you about long-term goals for your weight.

## Controlling Side Effects

Your medicines may cause side effects. Some of these can be lessened by eating the right foods and avoiding others. Here is a list of some side effects and how you can help control them:

Side Effect	Caused by	What to Do
Fluid retention	Prednisone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do not add salt to foods</li><li>• Do not eat salty foods</li><li>• Choose more fresh foods and fewer processed foods</li></ul>
High blood pressure	Tacrolimus Cyclosporine	
Loss of muscle mass	Prednisone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eat high-protein foods</li><li>• Exercise</li></ul>
High blood sugar	Prednisone Tacrolimus Cyclosporine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Control carbohydrate intake</li><li>• Control portion sizes</li><li>• Exercise</li></ul>
High potassium	Tacrolimus Cyclosporine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limit high-potassium foods (this is usually short-term)</li></ul>
Low magnesium	Tacrolimus Cyclosporine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Right after transplant, your care team will likely recommend a magnesium supplement</li></ul>
High levels of medicine in your blood	Tacrolimus Cyclosporine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice</li></ul>
Not absorbing enough calcium and phosphorus	Prednisone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eat 3 servings from the dairy group each day</li><li>• Or, take calcium and vitamin D supplements</li></ul>
High blood cholesterol	Prednisone Tacrolimus Cyclosporine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Choose low-fat, low-cholesterol foods</li></ul>
Increased appetite and weight gain	Prednisone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Choose low-fat/low-calorie foods</li><li>• Exercise</li></ul>

## **Your Food Choices After Transplant**

What you eat plays a key role in your health after transplant, the same as it did before your surgery. Before you leave the hospital, your dietitian will talk with you about your dietary needs and any nutrition concerns that you may have. Use the food lists, cooking ideas, and tables in the nutrition education material you received from your dietitian, to help meet these recommendations.

In the weeks after transplant surgery, you will be coming to the clinic often. The outpatient dietitian can meet with you during these visits to talk more about any questions or concerns you have.

Many patients eat in the hospital cafeteria on the days that they come to the clinic. The cafeteria has many healthy food choices, but you may be tempted by unhealthy options also available. You may want to bring your own breakfast or lunch to help you avoid making unhealthy food choices.

Once you have fully recovered, you may find that you gain weight. This happens because your diet is less strict, you feel better, and you have more opportunities to eat rich foods. But, weight gain increases your risk for high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, and high blood sugar. Your dietitian can help you make choices that will help you stay at the best weight for you.

## **Dietary Guidelines**

Here are basic dietary guidelines you may need to follow after transplant:

### **Sodium**

If you are retaining fluids and your blood pressure is high, you will need to follow a low-sodium diet.

### **Potassium**

Cyclosporine and tacrolimus can cause your blood potassium to be higher than normal. This is a short-term side effect, but if it happens, you will need to follow a low-potassium diet.

### **Fat and Cholesterol**

Your medicines may raise your blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels, which increases your risk of heart disease. A low-fat, low-cholesterol diet may reduce this risk. It will also help you avoid gaining weight, if that is a concern for you.

### **Carbohydrates**

Because your medicines can increase your blood sugar levels, you may need to watch how many carbohydrates you eat. Carbohydrates are not bad for you, but you may still need to limit these foods.

## Food Safety

**Food safety is important to help prevent infections after transplant.** Follow these tips:

- Wash your hands in warm soapy water before you eat or prepare food.
- Keep raw and cooked food separate in the refrigerator, and when you are preparing a meal.
- Cook food to the right temperature.
- Refrigerate leftovers within 2 hours after cooking.

## Unsafe Foods

These foods are unsafe to eat after transplant:

- Raw, unpasteurized juices, ciders, milk, and cheese
- Raw sprouts: bean, alfalfa, radish, and others
- Raw or undercooked meat, like rare hamburger or steak
- Undercooked eggs, like over-easy or in Caesar salad dressing
- Raw seafood, oysters, sushi, and sashimi

## To Learn More

Visit these websites to learn more about food safety:

- **FoodSafety.gov** has food safety information from the United States government. Visit [www.foodsafety.gov](http://www.foodsafety.gov).
- **Fight Bac!** gives tips on how to keep food safe from bacteria. Visit [www.fightbac.org](http://www.fightbac.org).

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Transplant Services:  
206.598.8882