

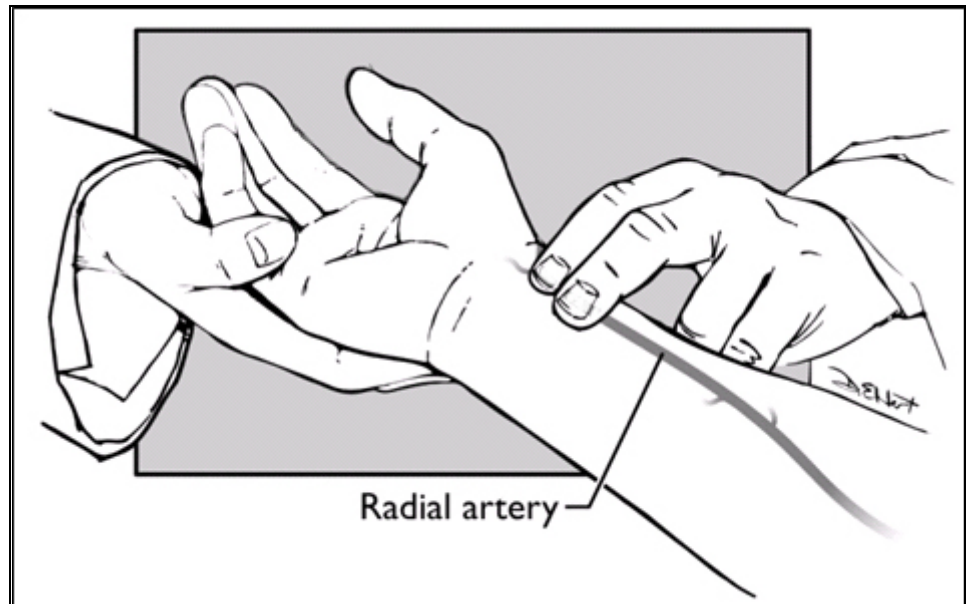
General Health Guidelines

Returning to a normal, active lifestyle

Now that you have your new heart, you'll want to get back to the activities and interests you enjoy. Follow these guidelines to help you stay healthy as you return to a more active life.

Keep Track of Your Vital Signs

You must take your blood pressure, pulse, and temperature 2 times a day, and weigh yourself each morning. Even small changes in your vital signs can tell us about changes in your overall health. They can be early warning signs of illness, rejection, or infection. This is why you must take your vital signs every day and report any changes to your transplant team.



Taking a wrist pulse

Carry Identification

Always carry identification (ID) that says you are a heart transplant patient, in case of emergency. We strongly suggest that you get a MedicAlert bracelet or necklace. You should also keep a list of your medicines and doses, along with the names of your doctor and nurse, in your wallet or purse. Brochures about the MedicAlert program and emergency cards are in the Cardiology Clinic.

We encourage you to get back to exercising and your favorite hobbies and activities after your transplant. But, it is best to start slowly so that you do not strain your incision. Any pain or discomfort around your incision is a warning sign to slow down.

Slowly Return to Physical Activities

Now that you have had your transplant, you are probably eager to get back to activities you enjoyed in the past. Your transplant team also wants you to start doing activities and exercise. But, there are some restrictions you must follow to make sure you heal properly after your surgery.

Bones heal slowly. Because your operation involved cutting your breastbone, you must follow some restrictions as you heal. Also, because you are immunosuppressed, you will heal more slowly than most other people.

Allow at least 8 weeks for healing to begin. It will take about 16 weeks for you to heal fully. This means it is best to start at a low level of exercise and build up slowly. Any pain or discomfort around your incision is a sign that you should slow down.

Here is a list of common activities and how long you should wait after surgery before starting them again:

Activity	Waiting Time
Walking	None – build up slowly
Driving	12 weeks
Stationary bicycling	None – build up slowly
Bicycling outside	12 weeks
Bicycle with curled handlebars	16 weeks
Golf – putting	12 weeks
Golf – chipping	12 weeks
Golf – full swinging	16 weeks
Swimming with a kickboard	12 weeks
Swimming with arm strokes	16 weeks
Rafting, canoeing, or kayaking	16 weeks
Horseback riding	16 weeks
Basketball	16 weeks
Football	16 weeks
Baseball or softball	16 weeks
Hunting	16 weeks
Jogging	Start with walking, then build up slowly

Driving

You can start driving again about 12 weeks after your transplant. This gives your incision and bones time to start healing.

The arm movements of steering and getting in or out of the car can strain your wounds if you try driving sooner than 12 weeks after your transplant. **Any strain on your incision can slow your healing.**

After driving again for the first time, your muscles may feel stiff or sore. Do not take long road trips for the first few weeks after you start driving again.

And, now that you have a new lease on life, be sure to wear your seatbelt!

Taking Trips

We suggest that you avoid long trips for at least 6 months after your transplant. During the first 6 months, you will need to have blood work done on a regular basis and there may be many changes to your medicines. Overnight or weekend trips to the coast or mountains should be fine about 4 to 6 months after your transplant, if you feel well and you are medically stable.

Travel Tips

- Tell your transplant team about any travel plans you have. If an emergency comes up while you are on a trip, please get medical attention and have the facility contact your UWMC transplant team.
- Any time you travel, take extra medicine with you. You don't want to run out if you run into any delays! If you travel by plane, carry your medicine on board with you. Do not put it in your checked bags. That way, if your checked bags are delayed, you will still have your medicine with you.
- Make sure you have your ID with you that says you are a transplant patient. You should also carry your medicine list and the names and phone numbers of your transplant cardiologist and nurse.
- If you plan to travel overseas, you will need to tell us which countries you plan to visit. We can tell you if you will need vaccines and if those vaccines may be dangerous for you because you are immunosuppressed. Also, before you leave the United States, check with your health insurance plan to see if you are covered for health care in other countries.

Alcoholic Beverages

We advise you not to drink alcohol after your transplant. Alcohol can affect the way your immunosuppressive medicines work. It can also harm your liver. Most medicines are broken down in the liver, so if your liver is damaged, your body will not process your medicines well. That means they will not work the way they should to keep you healthy.

If you plan to travel after your transplant, either inside or out of the United States, we ask that you tell us where you are going. We can help you find out about transplant services in the area you are going or any vaccines you may need.

*We strongly advise you **not** to smoke. Smoking harms your lungs, can speed up heart disease, and increases your risk of getting infections or cancer. If anyone in your home smokes, they should do so outside.*

Smoking

Your transplant team strongly advises you not to smoke.

Smoking harms the lungs. It causes lung cancer and can speed up heart disease. You are immunosuppressed, so you are already at a very high risk for infections and cancer. Smoking increases your risk even more.

You should also avoid smoky rooms. Breathing in secondhand smoke can harm your lungs as much as smoking. If anyone in your home smokes, they should do so outside.

Sexuality

You can resume sexual activity as soon as you are ready physically and emotionally. But, we recommend that you avoid straining your incision or your arms for 3 months after your transplant.

If you have a new sexual partner, be sure to ask if they have been exposed to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs, or venereal diseases). You also need to know if your partner has any other active infections. **We strongly advise you to use condoms.**

Women's Health Care

Pregnancy

If you are a woman who has had a heart transplant, talk with your doctor if you are thinking of becoming pregnant. Some of the medicines that you are taking may harm an unborn baby.

If you do not want to become pregnant, it is very important to use birth control. Pregnancy can occur even if you do not have regular menstrual periods. If you are sexually active, talk with your doctor about which method of birth control is best for you.

Preventive Care

Make sure you have a yearly pelvic exam, including a Pap smear. This can be done by your gynecologist or your regular family doctor.

You should also do a monthly breast self-exam, and have a yearly breast exam done by a doctor or nurse. Your doctor can give you information about how to do a self-exam. If you are over the age of 40, we also advise you to have a yearly mammogram.

Men's Health Care

Preventive Care

All men should do a monthly testicular self-exam. Your doctor can give you more information on how to do this exam. You should also have a prostate and testicular exam every year if you are over the age of 40.

Sexual Difficulties

Some men may have impotence or other sexual difficulties after transplant. This can be a result of having a long-term illness. It can also be a side effect of some of your medicines.

As you recover from your transplant and your medicine doses become more stable, these problems should start to get better. Sexual difficulties can be very frustrating. If they occur, it is important to stay calm. Talking with your partner can be very helpful. If impotence does not go away and is causing you stress, please talk with your doctor.

We suggest that transplant patients wait 6 months before having an eye exam, since changes to medicines can cause blurred vision or other changes. After that, we advise transplant patients to see an eye doctor once every 6 to 12 months.

Eye Care

You might have blurry vision or other changes in your eyesight for several months after your transplant. This may be from your medicines. If your vision changes are severe, you will need to have an eye exam. Most patients should wait about 6 months after transplant before having an eye exam. If you have one too soon after your transplant, your results may not be accurate, since your medicines are still being adjusted quite often.

Over time, the use of prednisone may lead to glaucoma or cataracts. We suggest that you have an eye exam done once every 6 to 12 months.

All of your eye care should be done by an *ophthalmologist*, not an optometrist. An ophthalmologist is a doctor who specializes in eye care.

Skin Care

There may be changes in your skin after your transplant. This is usually a side effect of your immunosuppressive medicines. You may have acne, oily skin, dry skin, easy bruising, or tearing of the skin. In most cases, you can control this on your own by keeping your skin dry, clean, and protected. You may need to try different soaps to find one that works best for your skin.

You will need to see a *dermatologist* (skin doctor) if your skin changes are severe. Your transplant team can help you decide if you need to see a dermatologist.

If you find any unusual sores, bumps, lumps, or rashes on your skin, call your transplant team. Immunosuppressed patients are more likely than other people to develop skin cancers or bacterial infections that affect the skin.

If you get a cut or scratch, wash the area well and keep it clean and dry. Watch out for signs of infection: redness, swelling, or tenderness. Read more about the care of cuts, scratches, and other wounds on page 17 of Chapter 4, “Infections.”



Be sure to wear a large-brimmed hat and long sleeves if you are going to be in the sun for a long time.

Sun Exposure

Prednisone will make your skin more sensitive to the sun. You may burn faster and more easily than before your transplant. Too much sun exposure can cause skin and lip cancers, especially if you get sunburned. The risk of skin and lip cancer is higher in transplant patients than in most other people because of the immunosuppressive medicines transplant patients take.

Be careful when you are out in the sun, and protect your skin:

- Always use sunscreen when you are outside. Products with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 15 or above will protect you best against sunburn.
- Reapply sunscreen often, especially after you have been swimming.
- Remember to protect your lips. There are many lip balms that contain sunscreen.
- Wear a large-brimmed hat and long sleeves if you are going to be in the sun for a long time, such as when you are gardening or out for a walk.
- You can also buy special clothing that protects you from sunburn.

Dental Care

Regular visits to the dentist help keep your teeth and gums healthy. The mouth is full of bacteria. Any time you have dental work done, you are exposing the rest of your body to a possible source of infection. For most people, this isn't a problem. But, immunosuppressed patients may be advised to take antibiotics before and after their dental work to avoid the risk of infection.

- Unless specific dental problems come up, wait for 4 to 6 months after your transplant before seeing a dentist. This is because the doses of your immunosuppressive medicines will most likely be lower by then. This will also reduce your risk of infections.
- Take good care of your teeth. Brush and floss your teeth well, every day, after meals and at bedtime. You can use a mouthwash, if you like.
- See a dentist once every 6 months. If your dentist will be cleaning your teeth or doing any other dental work that may involve contact with your gums, you may need to take antibiotics both before and after your visit. These antibiotics can help prevent infection.
- Call the transplant office to see if you need antibiotics. Your dentist can take care of the prescription for you.
- If you do need antibiotics, tell us and your dentist about any drug allergies you may have.
- Please allow plenty of time to get your antibiotic prescription filled before your dental visit.

*Transplant patients should **not** get vaccines that contain live viruses. Because transplant patients are immunosuppressed and at risk of infection, receiving vaccines with live viruses may actually cause the illnesses the vaccines are meant to prevent.*

Amoxicillin

The antibiotic given most often before dental care is amoxicillin. The usual dose is:

- 2 grams (four 500 mg pills) 1 hour before the dental visit, and
- 1.5 grams (three 500 mg pills) 6 hours after the dental visit

If you are allergic to penicillin, you will be given a different type of antibiotic.

Hair Care

Your hair may change while you are taking prednisone. It may seem weaker, so it is a good idea to wait until your prednisone dose is 20 mg a day or less before using chemicals on your hair. This includes coloring, perming, highlighting, and all other hair chemicals. Tell your hairdresser that you are taking prednisone before you have any hair treatments.

Some patients may have increased hair growth, especially facial hair. This can be very distressing, especially for women. Facial hair growth usually decreases as medicine doses are lowered.

If you have unwanted hair, you may want to try:

- Hair removal cream or waxing (follow the directions on the package)
- Electrolysis (permanent removal)
- Shaving

Please check with your transplant team before using any of these methods to see if they may cause any problems. The first 2 may affect or interact with the medicines you are taking.

Immunizations and Shots

Your transplant team recommends that transplant patients have a flu shot every year. We also recommend that you keep these other vaccines up to date:

- Pertusis
- Tetanus
- Pneumonia

Some immunizations contain live viruses, such as shots for measles, smallpox, and rubella. **You must never receive an immunization containing a live virus, because you are immunosuppressed.** If you get a live virus immunization, you may develop the disease that you are trying to prevent.

We recommend that your family and other household members also keep their vaccines up to date.

Questions?

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

Cardiology Clinic:
Weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.,
call 206-598-4300.

After hours and on weekends and holidays,
call 206-744-2500. Say you
are a heart transplant
patient. A nurse will assess
your problem and help you.