

Health Basics

Ways to stay healthy after a lung transplant

Now that you have had your lung transplant, we want you to resume a normal and active lifestyle. This chapter gives important information to help you stay healthy as you get back into your life.

Vital Signs

Right after your transplant, you will need to start taking and recording your *vital signs*. This means taking your heart rate (pulse), blood pressure, and temperature 2 times a day. You will also need to weigh yourself every morning. As time goes on, if you are doing well, you may only need to check your vital signs and weight as needed, or if you aren't feeling well.



After your transplant surgery, you will need to take your pulse and other vital signs 2 times a day.

Spirometry

At first, lung transplant recipients must check their *spirometry* (breathing test) **every day**. Small changes in your lung function can be an early warning sign of rejection, infection, or other problems. It is important to remember: If your FEV1 goes down 10% or more from your baseline, call the Lung Transplant Team **right away**.

After the first year, if you are doing well and your lungs are stable, you may check your spirometry less often – once a week instead of once a day. Always remember that changes in your lung function may be slow and subtle, and you may not have any symptoms. This is why it is so important to keep checking your spirometry. Otherwise, you may not catch changes that need treatment.

Medical Identification (ID)

We advise all lung transplant recipients to carry a list of their current medicines and contact information for the UW Medicine Lung Transplant Team in case of emergencies. If you choose, you may also wear a medical ID bracelet or necklace.

Returning to Your Activities

We strongly encourage you to be active and take part in physical exercise after your lung transplant. But, you must follow some restrictions in the first few months after your transplant surgery so that your body can heal.

Upper Body Restrictions

You will need to follow “upper body restrictions” to allow your *sternum* (breastbone) and other tissues to heal. Before you leave the hospital, we will tell you which activities you may not do, and how long you will need to follow these restrictions. Most patients are on upper body restrictions for about 8 to 12 weeks.

Walking

Walking is the best way to exercise and rebuild your strength after the lung transplant surgery. We encourage you to walk often and try to walk more each time. We also strongly advise you take part in a Pulmonary Rehabilitation program after you leave the hospital.

At first, you may feel short of breath with fast walking, walking up hills, and walking upstairs. Some patients worry that this means their lungs are not working. But most times, these problems are due to muscle weakness caused by a lack of exercise while waiting for a lung transplant.

Activities

You can resume most activities when you feel ready. Use your common sense as you go through each day. If something hurts, if you are too tired, or if you feel an activity is too much for you, back off for a while and try it again later. Be sure to give yourself plenty of time to recover from the transplant surgery.

Exercise

After your lung transplant, exercise **must** become a regular part of your life. Exercise will help keep you strong and keep your lungs healthy. Having a daily exercise routine, getting enough rest, and eating balanced meals will increase your strength and stamina, and will make you feel better overall.

Once the Lung Transplant Team tells you that you can return to all your activities, increase your exercise slowly. Your muscles may be very sore if you push yourself too hard, too quickly. Your goal is to do exercise that helps you get stronger, but does not cause you pain.

Call the Lung Transplant Team if you have any of these issues during exercise:

- *Systolic* blood pressure (upper number) higher than 190 mmHg
- *Diastolic* blood pressure (lower number) higher than 110 mmHg
- Feeling lightheaded
- Feeling a lot of pain

Driving

You cannot drive until the Lung Transplant Team tells you it is ok. Steering the car and getting in and out of the driver's seat:

- Will put strain on your wounds
- Can dislodge the tip of your sternum
- May delay healing of your other tissues

You also may not drive if you are taking *opioid* pain medicines. Opioids may cause sleepiness and impair your judgement.

Once you are cleared for driving, start slowly. You may be a little stiff and sore.

Travel

- Do not travel long distances from Seattle or your home until the Lung Transplant Team tells you it is OK. Once we lift this restriction, we still advise you to tell us if you plan any long-distance trips or travel to other countries. If an emergency arises, we need to know where you will be so we can direct you to the nearest lung transplant center. If you plan to be gone for a long time, we will need to work together to find a lab for blood tests as needed. We will also need to make sure you can get refills of your medicines.
- Anytime you travel, take a good supply of your medicines with you. It may be very hard to get more medicines if you are away from your pharmacy or out of the country.
- If you travel by airplane, we advise that you carry your medicines on the plane with you and not in your checked bags. This will protect you in case your bags are lost. We also advise all lung transplant recipients to carry a list of their current medicines, along with contact information for the UW Medicine Lung Transplant Team, in case of emergencies.



It is vital that you do not smoke, and that no one who is around you smokes.

- If you plan to travel to other countries:
 - Tell the Lung Transplant Team which countries you plan to visit. We can tell you if those countries require any vaccines or other precautions, such as treatment to prevent infections.
 - Before you leave the U.S., check your health insurance to see if you are covered while out of the country.
 - Think about buying travel insurance that will provide coverage for emergencies.

Alcoholic Drinks

In general, we advise that you do **not** drink alcohol after your lung transplant. Alcohol may affect the strength and potency of your immunosuppressive medicines. This may cause rejection of your new lung(s).

Smoking

Smoking is very harmful to your lungs. It can also increase your chance of infection. Because of this:

- The Lung Transplant Team insists that you **never** smoke.
- We also insist that your caregivers and other people who live with you or are around you do **not** smoke.
- Avoid places where people are smoking or the air is smoky.

Sexual Activity

You may resume sexual activity as soon as you are physically able and you feel good about doing so. But, be sure to follow all upper body restrictions until the Lung Transplant Team tells you otherwise.

If you have a new sexual partner, be sure to ask them if they have been exposed to sexually transmitted diseases or other infections. If they have been exposed, please call the Lung Transplant Team. We will talk about any testing or treatments you may need, and how to best prevent getting an infection.

We also strongly advise you use barrier protection such as a condom to prevent possible infection.

Pregnancy and Birth Control

Medicines you are taking can harm an unborn baby. They can cause birth defects and developmental delays. Talk with your primary care provider (PCP) if you are thinking about getting pregnant.

Women can get pregnant even if they are not having regular menstrual periods. This is why it is so important to use reliable birth control methods after transplant. Please talk with the Lung Transplant Team or your gynecologist to decide which birth control method is best for you.

Basic Healthcare

Health Screenings

- Suppressing the immune system increases your risk for cancer, so it is important to have routine cancer screenings. Stay current with mammograms and colonoscopies, and all the health screenings your PCP advises.
- Side effects of your transplant medicines include high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, and *osteoporosis* (thinning of the bones). Be sure to get regular screenings for these conditions.

Eye Care

- You may have blurry vision or changes in your eyesight in the first several months after your transplant. This can be related to your medicines. If it is severe, we may suggest that you see an *ophthalmologist*, a doctor who specializes in eye care.
- Over time, the medicine *prednisone* may cause *cataracts* or *glaucoma* (high pressure in the eye). We suggest that you have an eye exam every 1 to 2 years or as advised by your eye doctor. See an ophthalmologist for all your eye care, not an *optometrist*.

Skin Care

- You may have skin changes after your transplant. This can be a side effect of immunosuppressants. You may have acne, oily skin, dry skin, easy bruising, or skin tearing. You may need to see a *dermatologist* (skin doctor) if your skin changes cause problems.
- If you see any unusual sores, lumps, bumps, or rashes, contact the Lung Transplant Team **right away**.
- If you get a cut or scratch, wash the site well. Keep it clean and dry. Watch for redness, tenderness, or swelling. Call the Lung Transplant Team if you see any of these signs of infection.
- Some transplant medicines make your skin more sensitive to the sun. This means that you will sunburn more easily than before

your transplant. Immunosuppressants also increase your risk of skin cancer. Be sure to stay covered and use sunscreen when you are outside.

- We advise lung transplant patients to see a dermatologist at least once a year. This doctor can check for skin cancers or other skin problems.

Dental Care

- We advise you to practice good oral hygiene every day. This includes brushing your teeth and flossing. Infections in your mouth can cause infections in other parts of your body.
- Regular dental visits are important to keep your teeth and gums healthy and prevent infection. See your dentist every 6 to 12 months, or as often as your dentist advises.
- Unless you have other health problems that require antibiotics before dental work, you do not need antibiotic therapy for routine teeth cleanings or minor dental work. Follow your dentist's advice if they feel a planned treatment puts you at risk for infection.

Hair Care

You may notice some changes in your hair after the lung transplant surgery. Your hair may seem weaker or may fall out. Or, you may have an increase in hair growth, often on your face.

Most issues with hair get better with time. You may want to see a dermatologist if your symptoms cause you problems.

Your Staying Healthy “To Do” List

Because you are taking immunosuppressants, it is very important to:

- Stay current with all cancer screening as advised by your PCP.
- See a skin doctor (dermatologist) at least once a year.
- Have regular checks for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes, and osteoporosis.
- Visit the eye doctor (ophthalmologist) every 1 to 2 years to check for glaucoma and cataracts.
- Use your spirometer to check your lungs as directed. Call the Lung Transplant Team if you see any changes.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call the UW Medicine Lung Transplant Team if you have questions or concerns:

Weekdays from 8 am. to 4 p.m.: Call 206.598.5668.

After hours and on weekends and holidays: Call 206.598.6190 and ask to page the Pulmonary Transplant fellow on call.