



# Health Facts for You



Preparing for your liver  
transplant evaluation

**UW**Health



Welcome to the UW Health Liver Transplant Program. The team takes pride in building a care plan tailored to your needs. We are committed to your success. UW Health is a national and international leader in the field of transplantation. Our program provides care for both adult and pediatric patients. We offer both deceased and living donor transplantation.

### **The Liver**

It is good to have basic knowledge of how the liver works. The liver is part of the digestive system. It is the largest organ in the body. It has more than 500 functions, all of which are needed for life. Some of these functions include:

- Breaking down fats, storing nutrients, and making protein
- Cleaning poisons and waste from the body
- Fighting infections
- Blood clotting

### **End-stage Liver Disease**

This occurs when the liver has been permanently damaged. Causes may include:

- Infection
- Inherited diseases
- Autoimmune diseases
- Cancer
- Fatty liver and metabolic diseases
- Medicine induced liver disease
- Alcohol abuse
- Poisons

### **MELD**

These scores tell us how sick you are. The MELD (Model of End Stage Liver Disease) score is used for those who are 12 years of age or older. Scores range from 6-40. The higher the number, the more severe your disease. Death is also more likely without a transplant. Lab values (total bilirubin, creatinine, INR, sodium, and albumin) are used to calculate the MELD score.

### **Transplant Evaluation Visit**

The evaluation visit takes about 6-7 hours. It gives the team a complete overview of your liver disease and needs.

Since transplant is so complex and a strong support system is important in helping you have a successful experience, you are **required** to identify a primary support person who is 18 years of age or older and you **must** have this person present with you for your visits with the team during the evaluation. This could be a family member, friend, or guardian. This person must be willing and able to provide in-person support as you prepare for and recover from transplant. Lack of support could affect the decision of the committee.

To prepare for your evaluation, we have enclosed:

- **Advance Directives**  
These are legal forms that clearly state what actions to take if you can no longer make decisions for yourself. We strongly advise you to complete advance directives. If you have one, please **bring a copy** with you. We will add it to your medical record. We can help you complete these forms if you haven't already.
- **Patient and Support Expectations**  
These are documents that explain how we want patients and their support person to partner with us in their transplant care. Please read these documents with your family, friends, and other support persons.

## What to Bring to Your Evaluation

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>At least</b> one person you have identified for support
<input type="checkbox"/> Copy of Advanced Directives/Health care power of attorney if you have them filled out
<input type="checkbox"/> Completed Vaccine History form
<input type="checkbox"/> A list of your current medicines and supplements or pill bottles. This list should include doses and why you take them. Also bring medicines you may need to take during your appointment.
<input type="checkbox"/> A list of questions you or your support person have for the transplant team.
<input type="checkbox"/> Your insurance cards
<input type="checkbox"/> Phone charger
<input type="checkbox"/> Light jacket or sweater
<input type="checkbox"/> Snacks/sack lunch
<input type="checkbox"/> Something to do (tablet, book, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Social security number (for future transplant listing if approved for transplant)
<input type="checkbox"/> An overnight bag with essential items. Some patients are admitted for conditions found during the evaluation.

## The Transplant Process

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### Evaluation

- In order to make sure transplant is the best option, over weeks or months, you will:
  - Meet with the transplant team.
  - Complete tests and labs.
- After your evaluation, we will follow up with you about next steps.
- You may also start to seek out potential living donors during this phase.

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### Waiting Period

- If a transplant is considered by the team to be the best option, and you wish to proceed with surgery, you will be added to the national waitlist.
- This is done through the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS). UNOS is in charge of placing the donated organ with the right recipient, per UNOS policies.
- This phase can last days or years.
- If a living donor is approved, you will be scheduled for surgery after the donor work-up is done.

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### Surgery

- You receive the organ transplant and heal in the hospital.
- While healing, you and your family learn about new medicines, self-care, follow-up tests and clinic visits.

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### Follow-up

- This phase begins when you leave the hospital.
  - Medicines, labs tests, clinic visits and follow-up care are needed in order to lead a normal, active, and healthy life.
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## **Team Members**

### **Transplant Surgeons**

Transplant surgeons may meet with you during the evaluation. They review your record and test results and explain the surgery. They review the risks and benefits of transplant. The surgeon does the surgery and works with other doctors to manage your care after the transplant.

### **Transplant Medicine Doctors**

Transplant medicine doctors may meet with you during the evaluation. These doctors help to decide if a transplant is the best option for you. They stay involved while you are on the waiting list and after the transplant.

### **Pre-Transplant Nurse Coordinators**

These nurses coordinate your care before transplant. They are involved from the time of the first referral until a transplant is received. They arrange any tests needed to get you placed on the waitlist. This nurse helps you through the evaluation process. These nurses contact your local doctors and other healthcare facilities as needed.

### **Post-Transplant Nurse Coordinators**

These nurses coordinate your care after transplant. They are involved from the time of transplant through long-term, post-transplant care. They serve as your link to the rest of the transplant team after surgery. They work with the doctors to coordinate your medical needs. They teach you and your family and advocate for you. These nurses contact your local doctors and other healthcare facilities as needed.

### **Transplant Social Workers**

A transplant social worker will meet with you at your evaluation. They will talk with you about your support system, your drug/alcohol use, how you cope, and how well you will be able to follow important

instructions. They will do mental health assessments at evaluation. These questions help them learn more about your needs before the transplant. They can help with connecting you with community resources such as counseling, support groups, and financial support. They can also help you complete advance directives if needed. Social workers are also available for support after your transplant.

### **Transplant Counselor**

If alcohol is a contributing factor to your liver disease, you may meet with an addiction specialist. They will talk with you about your social history, substance use history, and mental health history to assess your risk for relapse. They will help connect you with local counseling resources or peer support if recommended by the transplant team. They are available for support in maintaining your sobriety both before and after transplant.

### **Transplant Dietitians**

Clinical dietitians assess your nutritional status, your mobility, and your strength. They help you to make a plan for good nutrition and exercise.

### **Physician Assistants and Nurse Practitioners**

These advanced practice providers care for you before and after your transplant. They check on you as you recover and help to manage your medicines. They also help to plan for your discharge needs. You will see them in transplant clinic before and after your surgery.

### **Surgical Residents and Transplant Fellows**

These doctors mainly assist with hospital care. This includes getting you ready for and assisting with surgery. They help to manage issues after surgery and prepare you for discharge. You may also see transplant fellows at transplant clinic visits.

### **Financial Counselors**

These staff work with you and your insurance company before and after transplant. They help to work through matters such as billing, deductibles, and drug coverage. They teach you about the financial aspects of transplant. They are the best resource for any questions about insurance.

### **Transplant Pharmacists**

Pharmacists work with the team to make sure the medicines are used correctly. They watch for side effects and try to minimize them. They also help to manage the timing of the medicines.

### **Inpatient Transplant Nurses**

These nurses care for you in the hospital. You will have a primary nurse. This nurse works with the rest of the team to get you ready for discharge.

### **Inpatient Nurse Case Managers and Social Workers**

Nurse case managers and social workers are available to help develop your plan for leaving the hospital. Some patients need skilled nursing care or other services. They help arrange this care or connect you to other community resources.

### **Transplant Clinic Nurses**

These nurses care for you during clinic visits. They provide care and support for you after procedures. They arrange follow-up care and provide education.

### **Office Support Staff**

Support staff answer your phone calls and work with the coordinators and other staff. They help coordinators to manage lab results and patient issues and concerns.

### **Spiritual Care**

Chaplains help people find comfort and meaning from their faith during illness recovery. Our chaplains provide spiritual and emotional support. They also perform sacraments. Faith and medicine offerings are provided in the hospital chapel. Catholic and Protestant services are held on Sundays.

### **Other Expert Doctors**

Other doctors may be involved either during the evaluation or after transplant. UW Health has many specialized doctors who work with the rest of your team. Infectious disease, dental, endocrine, and urology are just a few of the teams that can assist in your care if needed.

### **Other Services**

Other services are available to help you and your family. For example, Interpreter Services help those who need translation. Housing assistance can help if you need short-term housing.

## Financial Planning

You will need to learn more about your insurance plan. A person who gets a transplant needs life-long follow-up care and medicines. Learn about your co-pays and deductibles for clinic visits and tests. This will help you budget for this expense.

Many plans have a yearly maximum for co-pays or deductibles. When you have reached the limit, your insurance may pay 100%. Refer to your insurance booklet and keep track of your healthcare expenses.

Know the referral guidelines of your health plan. UW Health is a hospital-based clinic. You will get bills from the hospital and the doctors. If guidelines aren't followed, you may need to pay for the bill.

You may need to stay in Madison for some time after your transplant. Most insurance plans require prescriptions to be filled at certain pharmacies. Know your preferred pharmacy in your hometown and in Madison.

### Common Financial Questions

Below are some common questions which other transplant patients have found helpful.

- What would be my monthly total co-pay be if prescribed 15 medicines?  
15 x \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (the co-pay amount per prescription) =  
\$ \_\_\_\_\_
- What are the co-pays and deductibles for clinic visits and procedures?
- What do I need to pay out-of-pocket? Monthly clinic and procedure co-pays: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- How would this expense fit into my budget?
- What would I do if my insurance was changed? (Notify your coordinator right away!)
- My health plan referral guidelines:

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## Tips for Talking with Your Health Care Provider

You and your health care team are working toward the same goal - good health for you. Talk together about your health and any problems you may have. Here are a few tips to make the most of your time together.

**Use clinic and hospital visits to learn how to best care for yourself.** Ask questions. Practice new skills. Get advice about what might work best for you.

**Be a partner in making decisions.** Ask about your options. Find out about pros and cons of any decision. Plan your care with the health care team and others who support you.

**When you make an appointment, ask if you need any tests before you come in.** You may need to wait to eat or drink until after a test is done. Ask if you can do the test before your appointment. You may be able to get the results during your clinic visit.

**Prepare for your visit.** Think about the reason for your clinic visit. Write down what you want to tell your provider. Write down any questions you have. Ask the person who comes with you to help keep track of questions and answers.

**Be clear about your health problem and how you feel.** Before your clinic visit, you may want to write down:

- How long you have had your health problem,
- What you have done about it,
- How your health problem changed or stayed the same,
- What makes it better or worse.

**Share what you have been doing about your health problem.** If you have been treating yourself or changed the treatment, tell your provider. To best help you, your team needs to know how you are caring for yourself.

**Listen carefully.** If you don't understand, ask questions. Ask for more information if you need it. Take notes or ask for a written sheet if this would help you. Ask your health care provider:

- What your health problem is
- What caused it
- What you should do about your health problem
- When it will improve
- If you need a follow-up visit

**Make sure you know and agree with the plan.**

- Repeat what you have heard to make sure you understand what was said.
- Make sure the instructions are right for you. If they aren't, tell your provider. The plan can be changed to better meet your needs.
- Understand side effects and what to expect from any new medicines.
- Find out who to call for questions after you go home.
- Take your after-visit summary sheet at the end of a clinic visit. You can also find it in MyChart.

### **Learn More**

For more resources about transplant at UW Health, scan the QR code below.



Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 4/2024. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#8104.