

Cancer Risks After Transplant

Why Cancer Risk Is Higher After Transplant

Transplant patients take medicines life-long to prevent rejection of their new organ. These medicines suppress the body's normal immune system response of attacking foreign objects and abnormal cells, like cancer. Being immune-suppressed can also make your body vulnerable to viruses. Some viruses are known to stimulate certain types of cancer. Also, many patients have a family history of cancer, a history of cancer before transplant, or ongoing disease that may put them at a higher risk for certain cancers.

Most Common Types of Cancer After Transplant

Transplant patients have 5 times the risk or greater for these types of cancer:

- skin cancer,
- lymphoma,
- Kaposi sarcoma,
- liver cancer, and
- cancer of the anus, vulva and lip.

Other common cancers that are more common after transplant include:

- lung,
- kidney,
- colon,
- pancreas,
- Hodgkin lymphoma, and
- melanoma.

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer after transplant. Skin cancer is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal skin cells. Transplant patients have a 20-60 times higher risk of skin cancer than the general population. Risk factors include life-long sun exposure, fair skin, history of burns, and family history. The level of anti-rejection

medicines and amount of time taking them also increase risk.

Lymphoma or Post Transplant

Lymphoproliferative Disease (PTLD) has the highest incidence within the first year of transplant. This is when anti-rejection medicines are at their highest, although it can occur any time after transplant. PTLD is often related to Epstein Barr Virus.

Signs and symptoms of lymphoma can include:

- unexplained fevers,
- night sweats,
- unintended weight loss, and
- enlarged lymph nodes (in the absence of other infection).

Treatment varies based on extent of disease, time frame after transplant, age of recipient, and amount of current anti-rejection medicine. The transplant team works closely with the cancer and infectious disease teams if lymphoma occurs.

How to Prevent Cancer

There are many things you can do to prevent cancer.

- Reduce your exposure to sun as much as you can.
- Use sunscreen daily. Apply sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher. Apply a thick coat of sunscreen to all exposed skin 30 minutes before going out in the sun. Reapply every 2 hours that you remain in the sun. Reapply after swimming or sweating. Even if the sunscreen is water-resistant, some will wash off.
- Wear clothing that covers the skin. Wear wide brim hats and UV (ultraviolet) blocking sunglasses.

- Avoid mid-day sun (10:00 am-4:00 pm). This is when the sun's rays are most intense.
- Remember that sunburns can occur on cloudy days or from water or snow glare.
- Find shade under a tree, umbrella or other ways when you can.
- Use lip balm or cream that has SPF to protect your lips.
- Never go to UV tanning booths.
- Know which medicines can make your skin more likely to sunburn.
- Check your skin head-to-toe every month. Skin cancer usually appears as a growth that changes in color, shape or size.
- If you smoke, quit now.
- Avoid second-hand smoke.
- Eat a diet rich in fruits and vegetables and low in saturated fats.
- Exercise regularly.
- See your skin doctor (dermatologist) yearly for a full skin exam. Attend yearly physical exams with your local health care team.
- Let your doctors know of any new symptoms or complaints. See your doctor if you notice a suspicious lesion. This includes a non-healing sore, red scaly patch, shiny bump, wart-like growth or irregular shaped mole.

Early detection and treatment save lives. Cancer screenings (pap tests, mammograms, colonoscopies, prostate tests) should be guided by your primary care provider.

For More Information

www.transplantliving.org

www.cancer.org

www.skincancer.org

www.lymphoma.org

www.healthytransplant.com

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 © 5/2020. University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6780