

# Resuming Life After Transplant

## Clinic Visits

You will be seen quite frequently in the Liver Transplant Clinic during the first months after your discharge from the hospital. As time passes and your condition improves, we will see you less frequently.

At each clinic visit, you will have blood drawn before seeing your doctor. A Prograf, cyclosporin or Rapamune blood level will be drawn each time you come to the clinic. Do not take your Prograf, cyclosporin or Rapamune until after the blood has been drawn.

In addition, please remember to:

- ◆ bring a list of your medicines including dose and how often you take it
- ◆ bring a day's supply of all your medications with you, in case you are delayed
- ◆ bring your home records with you to each clinic visit
- ◆ organize your questions for your doctor.
- ◆ review your prescriptions so you may ask for new prescriptions if needed. *Note: we will only provide refills for those medicines prescribed by our team. Medicines prescribed by your local doctor should be refilled by that office.*

## Preventative Medicine

When you have completed the outpatient phase following your surgery and are ready to return home, some of your care will be taken over by your local doctor. Your relationship with your local doctor is important because, he or she will monitor your general health for prevention and acute needs. Additionally, the liver transplant doctors are not available everyday in clinic. We will send a letter to your doctor describing your transplant experience and your current condition, and instructing him or her in obtaining lab studies.

All of the members of our team feel very strongly that you should continue to follow the common health prevention recommendations that apply to all patients. Your local doctor can arrange these studies.

- ◆ Women over 40 should have a yearly mammogram and pap smear
- ◆ Everyone over 50 should have their stool checked for trace blood and a flexible sigmoidoscopy.
- ◆ Men over 45 should have a yearly prostate exam and blood test for prostate cancer.
- ◆ Wear a hat and sunscreen on exposed skin areas whenever going into the sun

In addition to these common recommendations, some liver transplant patients have special health maintenance needs. Patients who had previously identified benign polyps (benign growths which can grow into tumors if not removed) found in their colon before transplant will need a colonoscopy after transplant to make sure that no new polyps have formed. Patients with a condition called ulcerative colitis will require a colonoscopy every year after transplant to make sure that they are not at risk to develop colon tumors.

Second, being on powerful immunosuppressive drugs may increase your risk for cancer - especially skin cancer. However, you should know that this risk is very small and in our experience with liver transplantation, we have had very few problems related to cancer from immunosuppressive drugs. Your primary care doctor should routinely check you skin for abnormalities.

We also routinely check all patients who are 6 months or more out from their transplant for high blood cholesterol. Prograf, Cyclosporin, Rapamune and prednisone can elevate cholesterol. Therefore, if we discover that your cholesterol is elevated, we will recommend dietary changes or in some cases advise that you start taking a drug to help lower your cholesterol.

## Medical Condition Alert Bracelet

We strongly recommend that each liver transplant patient wear an identifying tag on either a bracelet or necklace after transplant. The following information should be included:

Your name  
Liver transplant recipient  
Immunosuppressed  
919-684-8111

Other serious conditions, such as diabetes or epilepsy, should also be included on the tag.

## Going Back to Work

It is our goal to make it possible for patients who have been employed to return to work after the transplant. Most patients can go back to work about three months after their transplant. Depending on the type of work you do and your financial situation, you may need to return to work as soon as possible.

It may be best to start back to work part-time and eventually move toward full-time work. We will assist you in

dealing with your employer and insurance company by providing them with any information they require to help you get back to work again.

## **Sexual Activity**

Sexual activity may be resumed after your incision heals, which is usually about six weeks after surgery. You should be careful at first to minimize the weight or strain that is put on your incision. Pain is the best indicator that too much weight is being put on the incision. Also, be especially careful of any tubes or drains you have in place.

In today's world, sex is sometimes a life-and-death matter, and everyone who is sexually active should take precautions to make sex as safe as possible. This is especially true for you, as the immunosuppressive medications that you are taking make you more susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases, as well as other infections.

The use of a latex condom is essential to safe sex. Using a condom does not guarantee that you will not get a sexually transmitted disease, but it is your best preventative measure. Some diseases that can be acquired sexually are hepatitis, CMV (cytomegalovirus), HIV, herpes, and candida (yeast infection).

If you are certain that your partner is monogamous, use of a condom may not be necessary. But since something as simple as a woman's common vaginal infection could cause serious infection in a male transplant patient, complete, candid communication with your partner is essential.

In such a situation, even faithful partners should use a condom or abstain from sexual intercourse.

Single people must insist on using a condom when a relationship becomes sexual. This is not always an easy or comfortable thing to do, but you have come too far to make what could be a very dangerous mistake.

Finally, do not forget about birth control. Although many women have had babies following their liver transplant, pregnancy could be hazardous. During the first year following your transplant, pregnancy would be strongly discouraged. Your transplant coordinator and doctor are available to discuss these matters with you if you so desire, so please don't be afraid to ask about your concerns.

## **A Final Word**

Please remember that it will always be important for you to practice good health habits and to take good care of yourself. A balanced life, one that includes good nutrition, rest, exercise, work and play will do wonders for your health. Please take your medication correctly, keep up with your daily records and come for your scheduled Transplant Clinic visits.

Remember that we are only a phone call away at any time. The transplant coordinator on call can be reached 24 hours a day by calling 919-684-8111 and asking for the Liver Transplant Nurse on Call.

It is hard to believe now, but in several months you will not think about your transplant every day. All that you've been through, and all the work you've done to make your liver transplant a success, is toward the ultimate goal to give you a fresh chance to enjoy life.