



### **What is a liver transplant?**

A liver transplant is when a sick liver is replaced with a healthy one from someone else. The healthy liver usually comes from someone who has died. In the future, it may be more common for the liver to come from a living person, such as a family member.

### **When is a liver transplant considered?**

A liver transplant is considered only when you might die from liver disease. Usually, more than one doctor will help decide if you need a liver transplant. Being told you need a liver transplant does not mean that you are in danger of dying right away. It usually takes a long time to find a liver that is right for you. For this reason, your doctor will try to decide whether you need a liver transplant months or years before you actually need one.

### **Why might my doctor think I need a liver transplant?**

Your doctor might think you need a liver transplant if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Yellowing of skin or whites of eyes (called *jaundice*)
- Fluid in your legs (called *edema*) or in your belly (called *ascites*)
- Thinning of your muscles, especially in your face, neck, and arms
- Easy bruising or bleeding
- Vomiting blood or passing blood in your stool
- Times when you can't concentrate or become easily confused
- Changes in your liver tests that suggest your liver is not healthy

### **Can anyone get a liver transplant?**

No, getting a liver transplant is very stressful on your body. Not everyone who needs a liver transplant can survive the major surgery involved. In some cases, your doctor might decide that a liver transplant is not safe. Some of the things that might prevent you from surviving a liver transplant include

- continuing to use alcohol or illegal drugs;
- being at high risk of using drugs or alcohol again after the surgery;
- being unable to follow your doctor's instructions, such as taking your medicine when you are supposed to;
- having too little support from people at home to care for you after the surgery;
- having cancer of the liver;
- having had another kind of cancer in the past three to five years;
- having heart, lung, or kidney disease;
- having hardening of the arteries.

### **What can I do to keep healthy before and after a liver transplant?**

If your doctor thinks you need a liver transplant, then you should do everything you can to keep healthy and strong. If you



follow the suggestions below, you can improve your chances of getting a liver transplant and feeling healthy after it is done. Some of these suggestions might also keep you from needing a transplant for a longer time:

- Do not use alcohol or illegal drugs.
- Get treatment for substance abuse problems.
- Get treatment for any mental illness or behavioral problems.
- Make sure you follow your doctor's advice to try to treat your liver disease.
- Eat healthy meals and lose weight if your doctor tells you to.
- Get treated for other health problems, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol.
- Stop smoking or chewing tobacco.
- Talk to your doctor before you use any prescription or non-prescription drugs, vitamins, supplements, or herbal medicines.

### ***What is life like after a liver transplant?***

Most people who get liver transplants go back to having a full and active life. Most of them live for many years. If you have a liver transplant, some things will be different. You will have to take medicine every day to make sure that your body does not reject your new liver. You will have to see your doctor often and learn to work well with the people on your health care team. You might need to keep getting treated for your liver disease, alcohol or drug use, or other health problems.

You might also have some new problems. Some people who get liver transplants have

trouble with diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and infections. Your doctor will help you deal with these problems.

### ***If I have hepatitis C, will it come back in the new liver?***

Yes. But new treatments for hepatitis C can help prevent hepatitis C from damaging your new liver.

### ***Can I get a liver transplant through the VA health care system?***

Yes. VA has a long history of doing liver transplants. It has special centers where the doctors are liver transplant experts. If your VA doctor decides you need a liver transplant, you will be referred to one of these centers.

### ***Where can I get more information on liver transplants?***

Contact the United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) Toll-Free Information Line at 1-888-TX-INFO-1 (1-888-894-6361) and visit the Web site at <http://www.patients.unos.org>

### ***Who can I contact for more information?***

Call your local VA medical center and visit the Veterans Affairs Hepatitis C Web site at <http://www.hepatitis.va.gov/>

Contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Hepatitis Toll-Free Information Line at 1-888-4-HEPCDC (1-888-443-7232) and visit the Web site at <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis>

*This material is not copyrighted and may be reproduced.*

*Public Health Strategic Health Care Group (13B)  
Veterans Health Administration  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20420  
IB 10-151 Revised June 2004*