

Liver transplant

Being assessed for this transplant



Your doctor has told you that you could have a liver transplant. This fact sheet explains what that involves and how you'll be assessed to see if you can receive one.

In what cases is a liver transplant proposed?

You have a serious problem in your liver. It prevents your liver from doing what it's meant to do (e.g., making essential proteins; cleaning the blood; producing a substance, called bile, that helps digestion).

This could be due to:

- liver cancer
- cirrhosis
- an auto-immune disease

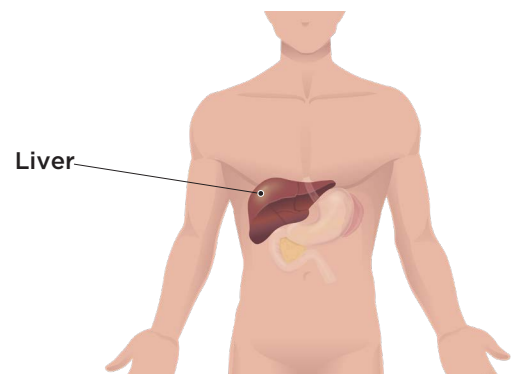
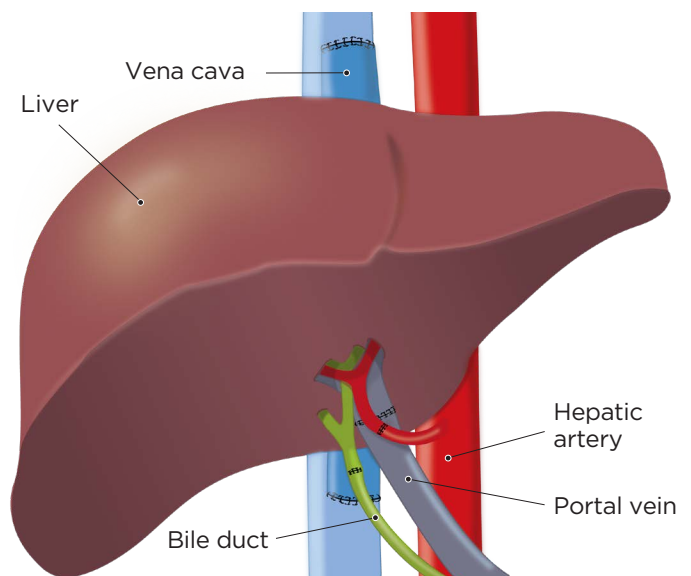
The various treatments are no longer sufficient. As the liver is a vital organ, this leads to all sorts of problems. A transplant can restore quality of life and sometimes prolong life.

What is a liver transplant?

A diseased liver is replaced by a compatible healthy liver. This liver can come from:

- a person who has just died
- a person still living who agrees to donate part of their own liver (a living donor). Often, this is a family member. See the health fact sheet [Living liver donation](#).

During the operation, the tube through which bile passes (bile duct) and the blood vessels (vena cava, hepatic artery, portal vein) are connected to those of the transplanted liver.



How long does the operation take?

It takes 4 to 6 hours.

You'll need to stay in the hospital for about 2 weeks after your operation.

Generally it takes 6 months to 1 year off work to regain strength after a transplant.

Are there any potential complications?

Three out of four people (75%) who have had a liver transplant are still alive 5 years later. Of those who die, many of the deaths are due to causes unrelated to the transplant.

However, there are risks associated with a liver transplant.

Your immune system, which defends your body against intruders, may fight your new liver as if it were a virus or bacteria. Your body may then reject it.

To stop these defensive actions and prevent rejection, you'll need to take medications **for the rest of your life**.

These drugs can cause side effects, such as the development of diabetes or osteoporosis.

Taking anti-rejection drugs also increases the risk of cancer. However, there are steps that can be taken to prevent this risk. See the health fact sheet [*Protéger sa peau du soleil pendant un traitement*](#) (French only).

In rare cases, the disease that made your transplant necessary could return.



What steps need to be taken BEFORE a transplant?

Before you can receive a new liver, you must be assessed and undergo several tests.

If the results show that a transplant is the right option for you, you'll be placed on a wait list managed by Transplant Quebec.



Why do I need to be assessed?

Certain health problems, such as chronic diseases, may affect the feasibility of having a transplant.

How will I be assessed?

First, you'll meet with the hepatologist. Depending on your health status, your assessment may be done:

- in the medical day unit
- in an outpatient clinic
- during a hospital stay in hepatology

A pre-transplant assessment nurse coordinates the whole process.

You'll need to have the following tests:

- > **Osteodensitometry:** to screen for osteoporosis.
- > **Electrocardiogram:** to see the electrical activity of the heart.
- > **Cardiac ultrasound:** to see your heart and its activity.



- > **Abdominal angioscan:** to see the blood vessels and certain organs, such as the liver.
- > **Lung x-ray:** to see if you have any lung disease, such as an infection, inflammation, or cancer.
- > **Cardiac CT scan:** to see if any arteries on the surface of the heart (coronary arteries) are blocked or narrowed.
- > **Mammogram:** to screen for breast cancer. This breast x-ray should be done if you're a woman over 50 years old.
- > **Colonoscopy:** to examine the wall of the large intestine to see if you have any small masses (polyps) or cancer of the colon. This exam is done with a long flexible tube with a camera attached to the end. You should have it done if you are 50 years old or older.
- > **PAP test:** to collect cells from the cervix that will be analyzed in the lab to see if they are normal.
- > **Bone scan:** to assess the health of your joints and bones.

You'll see the pre-transplant assessment nurse, medical specialists (e.g. surgeon, psychiatrist), other professionals (e.g. social worker, nutritionist), and a previous transplant recipient.

You'll also need to see a dentist for an examination and teeth cleaning. It's also important to repair or remove any teeth that need attention. Medications taken after a transplant can increase the risk of infections in the mouth.

The care team also ensures that you've received the vaccinations you need for the transplant.

How long does the assessment take?

Each case is unique. The time varies, depending on:

- the number of tests to be done
- the results of those tests
- the number of health professionals you need to see, depending on your case

An assessment in the outpatient clinic might be done in a single week. However, this means coming to the hospital every day.

What happens after the exams?

The transplant team meets to discuss your medical history and test results. They then decide if a transplant is the right option for you. Your doctor will call you afterwards to follow up.

If your health care team puts you on the Transplant Quebec list, they will provide information about you (e.g., your height, weight, test results, blood type). This is used to determine whether you are compatible with a liver donor.

How long will I have to wait before the transplant?

It's impossible to know. You could wait a few weeks or years. It depends on:

- your blood type
- your height
- your weight
- the seriousness of your illness

Your name might occasionally be taken off the wait list temporarily for certain reasons (e.g., if you have an infection, are traveling outside of Québec, etc.). See the health fact sheet [Waiting for a liver transplant](#).

Are there things I should plan now for after the transplant?

It's a good idea to carefully evaluate your drug and dental insurance coverage and your sick leave budget. It's important to consider what your needs will be after the transplant and how you can meet them.



You'll be able to meet with a social worker or a member of the pre-transplant assessment team if you're experiencing financial difficulties. If you need support with dental care, ask your dentist for a service referral.

What should I do if I need to cancel or postpone my appointment?

Call the CHUM Transplant Clinic, at **514 890-8255**. Office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday to Friday.

Who can I contact for help or to ask questions?

Don't hesitate to call your pre-transplant assessment nurse or to speak with your hepatologist.

It's normal for you and your loved ones to experience a lot of emotions during a transplant assessment. Don't hesitate to ask your pre-transplant assessment nurse to refer you to psychological support services.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Canadian Liver Foundation:

> **1 800 563-5483**

> liver.ca

Montreal region:

> **514 876-4170**

Transplant Québec:

> transplantquebec.ca/en

Other health sheets published by the CHUM are available. Ask for those that might fit your situation.



You can also find them on our website

chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the recommendations and diagnoses made, or the treatment suggested by your health professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
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