

Liver Transplant Preparation Checklist

A step-by-step guide for patients, caregivers, and families



A liver transplant is a journey with many steps: referral, evaluation, waiting, surgery, and lifelong follow-up care. Being organized helps you move through each stage with less stress and helps your transplant team help you. This free checklist from The Liver and Kidney Hope Foundation walks you through what to prepare at every stage.

How to use this checklist

Work through one section at a time. Check off items as you finish them, and write notes in the margins. Every transplant center has its own requirements, so some items may not apply to you, and your center may add others. Bring this checklist to appointments and share it with your caregiver.

Important

This checklist is for general education only and is not medical advice. The Liver and Kidney Hope Foundation is not a medical provider. Your transplant center's instructions always come first. If you have a medical emergency, such as vomiting blood, severe confusion, or high fever, call 911.

1. Getting Started: Referral & First Steps

Most people begin the transplant process through a referral from their hepatologist or gastroenterologist.

- ☐ Ask my liver doctor whether I may be a transplant candidate and request a referral
- ☐ Research transplant centers (location, volume, insurance accepted, living donor program) and choose one
- ☐ Call my insurance company to confirm transplant coverage, in-network centers, and prior-authorization rules
- ☐ Gather my medical records: liver history, lab results, imaging, biopsy reports, hospital stays, and a list of all doctors
- ☐ Write down all medications, vitamins, herbal products, and supplements with doses
- ☐ Ask my team to explain my MELD score (the score used to prioritize adult liver transplants in the U.S.) and how often it will be updated

2. The Transplant Evaluation

The evaluation checks whether a transplant is safe for you and helps the team plan your care. It is often done over several days.

Medical tests (as ordered by my team)

- ☐ Blood tests, including blood type, liver and kidney function, and infection screening
- ☐ Imaging of the liver and blood vessels (ultrasound, CT, or MRI)
- ☐ Heart and lung testing (such as ECG, echocardiogram, or stress test) if requested
- ☐ Endoscopy to check for varices, if requested
- ☐ Age-appropriate cancer screenings are up to date
- ☐ Dental exam and clearance, with any needed dental work completed
- ☐ Vaccinations reviewed and updated, as my team advises

Meetings with the transplant team

- ☐ Meet with the transplant hepatologist and surgeon
- ☐ Meet with the transplant social worker (support system, housing, transportation, coping)
- ☐ Meet with the financial counselor (insurance, medication costs, out-of-pocket expenses)
- ☐ Meet with the transplant dietitian
- ☐ Meet with the transplant pharmacist to learn about anti-rejection medicines
- ☐ Complete the mental health and substance-use assessment the center requires

3. Alcohol, Substances & Center Requirements

Transplant centers have specific rules about alcohol and other substances, whatever the cause of your liver disease.

- ☐ Ask my center exactly what its alcohol and substance-use requirements are
- ☐ Avoid all alcohol, including in cooking wine, some mouthwashes, and "non-alcoholic" drinks, unless my team says otherwise
- ☐ Complete any required counseling, treatment program, or testing, and keep records
- ☐ Stop smoking and vaping; ask my team about support to quit
- ☐ Tell the team about every over-the-counter medicine or supplement before taking it (some can harm the liver)
- ☐ If I need support, ask the social worker about recovery resources for me and my family

4. Exploring Living Donation

In living donor liver transplant, part of a healthy person's liver is transplanted. Both livers regrow over time. Not every center offers this.

- ☐ Ask whether my center has a living donor liver program and whether I qualify
- ☐ Learn how to share my story with family, friends, and community
- ☐ Identify a donor champion who can speak on my behalf
- ☐ Give interested donors the center's living donor contact information (donors are evaluated separately to protect them)
- ☐ Understand that potential donors have their own independent advocate and can change their mind at any time

5. While I'm on the Waiting List

Being listed means you must be ready at any time. Staying as well as possible and reachable keeps you active on the list.

Stay reachable

- ☐ Give the center every phone number where I can be reached, and keep my phone charged and on at all times
- ☐ Tell the center right away if my phone number, address, or insurance changes
- ☐ Ask how close to the center I must live or stay while listed, and tell the team before traveling

Manage my health

- ☐ Keep all lab appointments so my MELD score stays current
- ☐ Take medications exactly as prescribed, including medicines for confusion, fluid, or varices
- ☐ Follow my team's guidance on sodium, fluids, and protein
- ☐ Stay active in ways my doctor approves to keep up strength
- ☐ Do not drive if my team has told me not to (liver-related confusion can affect driving)
- ☐ Know the warning signs to report right away: confusion, black or bloody stool, vomiting blood, fever, yellowing skin, or rapid belly swelling
- ☐ Report any hospital stay, infection, or new diagnosis to the transplant team

6. Planning My Support & Logistics

Most liver transplant centers require a committed caregiver plan before listing.

- ☐ Choose a primary caregiver and a backup caregiver who can provide support around the clock in the early weeks, if my center requires it
- ☐ Plan transportation to the hospital at any hour, plus rides to frequent follow-up visits (I may not be able to drive for a while)
- ☐ Arrange lodging near the center if I live far away (ask the social worker about nearby housing)
- ☐ Plan time off work and ask HR about FMLA or disability options; plan for my caregiver's time off too
- ☐ Arrange care for children, pets, and household tasks for several weeks
- ☐ Make a budget for travel, lodging, parking, meals, and medication co-pays
- ☐ Explore fundraising or assistance programs if needed (ask the social worker for options)
- ☐ Complete or update an advance directive and choose a healthcare power of attorney

Caregiver tip

Caregivers need support too. Encourage your caregiver to write down their questions, attend key appointments with you, and plan breaks for themselves.

7. Ready for The Call: Hospital Bag

When a liver becomes available, you may have only a few hours to get to the hospital. Pack ahead.

- ☐ Photo ID, insurance cards, and transplant center contact card
- ☐ Current medication list (and medicines in original bottles if the center asks)
- ☐ This checklist and my contact list
- ☐ Phone, charger, and a long charging cable
- ☐ Loose, comfortable clothing that won't press on my incision, and non-slip shoes or slippers
- ☐ Toiletries, glasses or contacts, hearing aids, and CPAP machine if I use one
- ☐ A notebook and pen for questions and instructions
- ☐ A written plan telling family who to notify and who will care for children or pets
- ☐ Know my center's rules about eating and drinking once I get the call

8. Preparing for Life After Transplant

Recovery and follow-up care are just as important as the surgery itself.

- ☐ Learn the names, purpose, and schedule of my anti-rejection (immunosuppressant) medicines
- ☐ Choose a pharmacy that can reliably stock transplant medicines, and confirm my coverage
- ☐ Set up a pill organizer and phone reminders so I never miss a dose
- ☐ Plan for frequent lab work and clinic visits in the first months
- ☐ Learn the signs of rejection, infection, and bile duct problems, and know when to call the team
- ☐ Learn food safety and infection-prevention habits recommended by my team
- ☐ Plan sun protection and regular skin checks, as advised
- ☐ Ask when I can drive, lift, return to work, and resume exercise
- ☐ Plan for lifelong alcohol avoidance and ongoing recovery support if it applies to me
- ☐ Connect with a transplant support group (TLHF's support groups are a great place to start)

9. My Transplant Contacts

Role	Name	Phone	Notes
Transplant coordinator			
Transplant center after-hours line			
Transplant hepatologist			
Hepatologist / GI (my liver doctor)			
Social worker			
Financial counselor			
Primary caregiver			
Backup caregiver			
Pharmacy			
Insurance company			
Recovery or counseling support (if applicable)			

10. Questions to Ask My Transplant Team

Some starting points. Add your own and bring this page to appointments.

- ☐ What is my current MELD score, and how often will it be updated?

- ☐ What could make me temporarily inactive on the list?
- ☐ How close to the center must I live or stay while waiting?
- ☐ How will I be contacted when a liver is available, and how quickly must I respond?
- ☐ Does this center offer living donor liver transplant?
- ☐ What will my medications cost, and what help is available?

My Questions	Answer / Notes

11. Trusted Resources

Your transplant center — your first and best source of information about your care

Transplant Living (transplantliving.org) — patient education from UNOS

American Liver Foundation (liverfoundation.org) — liver disease and transplant education and support

Organ Procurement and Transplantation Network (optn.transplant.hrsa.gov) — U.S. transplant system policies and data

SAMHSA National Helpline (1-800-662-4357) — free, confidential treatment referral for substance use, 24/7

The Liver and Kidney Hope Foundation — education, community support, and support groups for patients and families

© The Liver and Kidney Hope Foundation, a Nevada 501(c)(3) nonprofit. This checklist may be freely printed and shared for non-commercial educational use. Information is general and may not reflect every center's policies. Always confirm details with your transplant team.