

The Window of Opportunity for a Liver Transplant

- ✓ It can be difficult to know when to consider getting a liver transplant.
- ✓ The goal of this document is to provide information that will help you be more informed when you talk with your healthcare team. Your team will work with you to decide when to get an evaluation.
- ✓ The timing of referral for a transplant evaluation is important. You don't want to be evaluated too soon. You also don't want to wait too long. Err on the side of an early visit instead of a late one.
- ✓ There is a window of opportunity—when you are sick enough to need a transplant and healthy enough to go through the surgery. Your health can change quickly when you have advanced liver disease. This can make it more difficult to find the window of opportunity.
- ✓ When you meet with the transplant team, it is important to bring family or friends to every appointment. Your social support system and ability to be on time and organized can influence whether you are eligible for a transplant.
- ✓ Liver transplant specialists are called transplant hepatologists.

It May be Time for an Evaluation When...

The experiences below might prompt you to talk with your healthcare team about an evaluation:

- ✓ You have symptoms of worsening ascites. Ascites is fluid buildup in the abdomen. Symptoms of worsening ascites include increased pain and bloating in the abdomen, shortness of breath, rapid weight gain, fatigue, nausea, and vomiting.
- ✓ You have gastrointestinal (GI) bleeding. Symptoms of GI bleeding include vomiting blood, black stools, and blood in the stool.
- ✓ You have symptoms of worsening encephalopathy. Encephalopathy occurs when toxins travel to the brain because the liver did not adequately clear the toxins from the blood. Symptoms of worsening encephalopathy include increased confusion, disorientation, extreme sleepiness, and slowed movements. Encephalopathy can lead to a coma.
- ✓ You have pleural effusion, which is a buildup of fluid around the lungs. Symptoms include shortness of breath, chest pain, cough, and low blood oxygen levels.
- ✓ You have had multiple hospital admissions for liver disease.
- ✓ You struggle to do everyday tasks or can no longer work due to liver disease symptoms.
- ✓ You are losing muscle mass and strength. You might have weakness, fatigue, or reduced stamina.
- ✓ You have edema (swelling) in the legs, ankles, or feet.
- ✓ You have extreme or disabling itching.

MELD Scores and Eligibility for a Liver Transplant

- ✓ MELD stands for Model for End-Stage Liver Disease.
- ✓ A MELD score is calculated as part of the liver transplant evaluation.
- ✓ This is a scoring system to rank patients based on how sick they are. The MELD score ranges from 6 (less sick) to 40 (very sick). The higher the score, the higher priority for a liver transplant.
- ✓ The MELD score is calculated from results of blood tests that measure liver and kidney function.
- ✓ Eligibility for a liver transplant is based on your MELD score, lung function, other aspects of overall health and how much social support you have.
- ✓ You may not be eligible for a transplant if you have other serious health problems like active cancer, severe heart disease, or uncontrolled infections.
- ✓ In Alpha-1, the severity of lung disease affects eligibility for a liver transplant. Combined transplants of lung and liver are sometimes performed, but both organs must have advanced disease.

Additional Resources

- ✓ AlphaNet's Big Fat Reference Guide (BFRG) has a large section devoted to liver health. Chapter 19 of the BFRG focuses on liver transplants. Anyone can access [AlphaNet's BFRG](#). AlphaNet Subscribers can access the BFRG through their [Subscriber Portal](#).
- ✓ AlphaNet has created several 1-page documents that focus on liver health, which are available [here](#).