

Pain Control After Liver Transplant

How much pain will I experience after liver transplant?

Experiencing pain after a liver transplant is common. The transplant team will work with you to manage it. Our goal for pain management is to greatly reduce your pain, however, you may not be completely pain-free.

Pain management is important to your recovery after liver transplant. By reducing your pain, the goal is for you to be able to move around more easily and do therapy exercises. This will help prevent complications like blood clots and help you recover and gain strength.

How will my pain be managed after liver transplant?

The transplant team will use different methods to help you manage your pain. You will be prescribed pain medications, both opioid (narcotic) and non-opioid pain medications (acetaminophen). They will also recommend other non-medication pain management methods.

What are opioids?

Opioids are natural or artificial chemicals that reduce the feeling of pain. Commonly used opioid medications include: morphine, oxycodone, hydrocodone/acetaminophen, and hydromorphone. The transplant team will choose which medication is best and safest for you.

Are opioids safe?

Prescribed opioid medications are often necessary for pain control after liver transplant. To take opioids safely, it is important that you take them as

directed by the transplant team and follow any other pain management instructions.

Long-term use of opioid pain medications may increase your risk of becoming addicted to opioids. It could also lead to poorer outcomes after liver transplant, and may delay your recovery. Your transplant team will work with you to decide the safest medication plan for you in your recovery.

What are the side effects of opioids?

Even when you take prescription opioids as directed, you may experience side effects. Side effects of opioids include:

- Tolerance – need to use increased doses to get same pain relief
- Physical dependence – having withdrawal symptoms when stopping medication
- Increased sensitivity to pain
- Constipation
- Nausea, vomiting, dry mouth
- Sleepiness, dizziness, confusion
- Itching
- Reduced urge to breath (respiratory depression) causing lack of oxygen

How long will I need to be on opioid pain medications?

The transplant team will work with you to get you off opioid pain medications as soon as safely possible. At each visit, the transplant team will evaluate your pain control and instruct you on how to manage your pain with medication and non-medication methods. You will receive a prescription for enough opioid pain medication to get you to your next clinic appointment. You will only receive prescriptions for opioid pain medications after you have been seen in clinic.

What other medications might I take?

To help decrease the amount of opioid pain medications, you may be instructed to take other non-opioid pain medications like acetaminophen (Tylenol).

Remember the **maximum amount of acetaminophen you should take in 24 hours is 2000 mg (4-extra strength tabs or 6 regular size tabs)**. You may not notice a big decrease in your pain, but you should still take non-opioid pain medications because using these medication(s) will help you get off opioid pain medications.

What else can I do besides take medication to help decrease my pain?

There are other things besides medications that will help decrease your pain. The transplant team will work with you to identify which of the following methods may be best for you:

- Physical therapy
- Cold or heat for muscular pain (do not use on incision)
- Relaxation, meditation, guided imagery and distraction
- Support from others or counseling

How do I dispose of unused opioid medications?

Please check out the following websites for medication disposal information:

- Michigan Medical School–Medication Take Back Events:
<https://medicine.umich.edu/dept/pain-research/pain-medication-take-back-program/dispose-household-medications>
- Map of opioid disposal sites in Michigan: <http://michigan-open.org/takebackmap/> type in your location under the map to find locations to dispose of leftover medication.

Who do I call if I have any questions or problems?

Please call:

- Transplant Office: (1) (800) 333 – 9013

Transplant Center
Pain Control After Liver Transplant

- Monday-Friday, 8:00am - 4:30 pm -Evenings, weekends, and holidays
- Michigan Medicine Operator: (734) 936 - 4000 -ask for transplant doctor on-call

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Author: Sarah Tischer, PharmD, Lavinia Pacurar, NP

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#). Last Revised 10/2017