

Stem Cell Transplant: Returning Home

After a blood stem cell transplant, healing and recovering take time and care.

You may have received stem cells from yourself or from another person.

Depending on the type of transplant you had, you may have to stay in the hospital or transplant center for several weeks or longer.

Sometimes, if the stem cells came from your body, you may be able to recover at home.

But you'll still need to come to the hospital or transplant center every day for checkups, treatments, and blood tests.

Once you're home, your recovery may take anywhere from 6 months to a year or so.

And while you're recovering, you may feel weak, tired, or have other symptoms.

Rest when you can, and notice when you're feeling better and growing stronger.

Healing takes a while, but you will start to feel better with some time.

When you get home, you'll also continue to need care and help from your caregivers for several weeks at least.

What else can you expect?

For the next 6 to 12 months, you'll see your doctor and have your blood tested often.

You may get blood transfusions until you can make enough blood cells of your own.

If the stem cells came from another person, your doctor will check for signs that the new cells are doing well in your body.

If you are having difficulty eating and drinking, you may need an I.V. for nutrition or fluids.

Now, there are things you can do for yourself to heal well and feel better.

First, follow any instructions you were given about activity, diet, medicines, and preventing infection.

You may need to take medicines to prevent infections for several months.

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And you can take steps to help protect yourself, including washing your hands, avoiding public places, avoiding certain foods, and avoiding people who may be sick.

Also, if you have pets at home, let your care team know.

They'll have tips to help you stay safe.

Next, get plenty of rest.

But it's also important to continue to increase your activity level as your doctor recommends.

Walking is something you can try to help you get your strength back.

During your recovery, you could try reaching out to a friend, a loved one, or your partner.

Let them know how you're doing and how they can help.

They may be waiting for your call.

You might want to try keeping notes about how you're feeling and to track your medicines.

Also, watch for problems, and call your doctor if you have any questions or concerns.

Some problems after a stem cell transplant can become life-threatening.

Your doctor will let you know when it's safe for you to go to public places where you could be exposed to germs from other people.

Be sure to call your doctor right away if you have a fever, chills, or sweats or shortness of breath.

And call if you feel dizzy or have confusion or have bleeding that will not stop.

If you still have your catheter, call if you have problems or any signs of infection around the catheter, such as increased pain, swelling, or warmth or reddish streaks leading from the area.

Be sure to call if you have new or worse pain.

Call if you have symptoms such as a cough, runny nose, sore throat, a rash, cold sore-like blisters, or blood in your urine or pain during urination.

And call if you're sick to your stomach, not eating well, or are vomiting or having diarrhea.

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Now, you know yourself best, so watch for and call if you notice any other changes in your health.

Remember, it takes time to recover and heal from a stem cell transplant.

And it can help to know that everyone recovers at a different pace.

Take care, and be kind to yourself.