

Rejection – Liver

Transplant rejection happens when the patient's immune system recognizes that the new liver is different. The job of the immune system is to protect us from things that may be harmful like germs or cancer cells or those cells coming from a new organ. This is a normal part of transplant, and is treated with medicines.

There are a number of anti-rejection medicines to help treat graft rejection. Since each transplant patient is different, the team will order a mix of medicines that works best for each patient.

Types of rejection:

- **Acute** rejection happens most often in the first weeks to months after transplant, but can happen at any time. It happens when the body senses the new organ is different and causes inflammation or irritation of the liver cells. It is treated with steroids and changes in the anti-rejection medicines.
- **Chronic** rejection happens most often months to years after the transplant. It happens slowly when the body attacks the liver cells. It does not involve inflammation so cannot be treated with steroids. It happens in about 10 percent of post liver-transplant patients. A small percentage of patients who have chronic rejection, over time, may need another transplant.

Signs and symptoms:

- flu-like
- chills, fever and body aches
- majority have no symptoms

The most common way to find rejection is through lab work and a liver biopsy. An increase of the liver function tests tells us something is bothering the liver. This might be a virus, medicine, rejection or lab error. If the liver function tests are higher, the first step is to repeat the lab work. If the liver function tests remain high, a liver biopsy and/or radiology test (such as an ultrasound) will be ordered to try to solve the problem.

Summary:

- Rejection is a common problem after a transplant. Rejection can occur at any time.
- Anti-rejection medicines should be taken as ordered. If doses of medicine are routinely missed, this may cause rejection.
- If you are having trouble taking or getting your medicines, call the transplant office.
- You play the most important part in your health care – stay calm, stay healthy and keep in touch with the transplant team.