



Patient & Family Guide

2022

After a Liver Transplant

Changes in Your Mental Health



www.nshealth.ca

After a Liver Transplant – Changes in Your Mental Health

This pamphlet explains how having a liver transplant may affect your mental health.

After you are discharged from the hospital, the liver transplant psychologist will call you to ask how you are doing. **Please read this pamphlet before they call**, so that they can answer any questions you may have.

When will my life be back to normal?

- After having a liver transplant, your life will likely not go back to the way it was before your liver disease. Instead, your new way of living will become normal. For example, you will need regular monitoring and medical follow-up, and you will need to take medications for the rest of your life.
- While everyone's experience is different, you may face some common challenges. Most people also have positive and rewarding experiences.

Common physical changes include:

- › Medication side effects
- › Possible complications (like infections, liver rejection, delirium [confusion])
- › Pain or discomfort
- › Fatigue (feeling tired) or weakness

Common social changes include:

- › Not being able to do things on your own
- › Social isolation (not seeing people as much as you would like)
- › Changes in your roles (as a partner, parent, caregiver) now that you are healthy
- › Not being able to go back to work
- › Financial (money) concerns

Common emotional changes include:

- › Fear
- › Worry about health, finances, or your relationships
- › Sadness
- › Anger
- › Guilt
- › Shame
- › How you feel about your body
- › Wondering who you are now that you have a new liver

Common mental health changes include:

- › Mood-related disorders (like depression)
- › Anxiety-related disorders (like generalized anxiety disorder)
- › Trauma-related disorders (like post-traumatic stress disorder or PTSD)
- As many as 1 in 3 people who have had a liver transplant may have some of the mental health changes listed above.
- Mental health concerns are more common in people who have medical complications or medication side effects.

Are my feelings normal?

- Having a liver transplant can cause a lot of changes in your life. If your loved ones have not had a transplant, they may find it hard to understand what you are going through.
- For many people, the transplant process causes them to have a lot of emotions. This is normal. **There is no right way to feel after a transplant.**
- You may even have feelings that seem to conflict (like feeling grateful and angry). Having negative feelings does not mean that you are bad, ungrateful, or do not deserve your new liver.

When should I get help?

There are a few important questions that can help you decide if you or your loved one(s) may need further support. If you answer yes to any of these questions, you may want to consider reaching out for help:

1. Is the mental stress **persistent (does not go away)**? For example, is it happening nearly every day, and for much of each day?
2. Does the emotional distress **affect my ability to function**? For example, does it make it hard for me to do my usual activities or socialize?
3. **Can I cope** with this level of emotional distress? For example, does it bother me so much that I feel like I cannot manage it on my own?

How do I get help?

- Your post-liver transplant nurse can help with some of your concerns. They may also recommend that you contact your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner).
- Your post-liver transplant nurse may also recommend mental health supports. If needed, they can refer you to a psychologist, social worker, or a psychiatrist. Private health insurance may be needed in some cases. Ask your post-liver transplant nurse for more information.
- You **may** be able to meet with the liver transplant psychologist. Wait times will vary. Ask your post-liver transplant nurse for more information.
- Mental health supports are also available through community mental health programs. Ask your primary health care provider for more information.
- There are also many online, self-guided programs available. Visit the Nova Scotia Health Mental Health and Addictions website for free tools:
 - › <https://mha.nshealth.ca/en/tools>

If you need mental health help right away:

- Call the Provincial Mental Health and Addictions Crisis Line.
 - › Phone (toll-free): 1-888-429-8167

OR

- › Call your primary health care provider.

If it is an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department.

Looking for more health information?

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit <https://811.novascotia.ca>

Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

Nova Scotia Health promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.

Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!

www.nshealth.ca

Prepared by: Psychology, Multi Organ Transplant Program

Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services

The information in this pamphlet is for informational and educational purposes only.

The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

W185-2297 © July 2022 Nova Scotia Health Authority

The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.