Living Donor Liver Transplants

June 12, 2019 By Connie M. Welch

The liver is a vital organ which performs life-sustaining functions for the body. If the liver becomes diseased or damaged where it can no longer function, a person's life is at risk. Hepatitis C, cirrhosis and liver cancer are the major contributors to liver transplants in the U.S.

Two Types of Liver Transplants

There are two types of liver transplants. The most common is a liver transplant from a deceased donor. Living-donor liver transplants are another option.

Traditional Liver Transplant

Traditional liver transplant from a deceased donor involves the patient being put on a liver transplant list and receiving a MELD score which evaluates their need for transplant as they wait. The average wait time for a patient to receive a liver in the U.S. is 20 months from the time they are given a MELD score and wait for a liver to become available.

Once a deceased liver becomes available for the patient and is a right match, the deceased donor's entire liver is used for transplant.

Living Donor Liver Transplant

For living-donor liver transplant, a live person donates a portion of their healthy liver to the patient whose liver no longer functions properly. The liver then regenerates itself to normal size and function for the patient as well as the donor within weeks to months.

The American Society of Transplantation states, "In the U.S., more than 17,500 patients are waiting to receive a liver. Every day more patients are added to the waiting list. More than 6,000 patients receive transplanted livers each year, but more than 1,700 patients die each year while waiting for a liver."

Benefits of Living Donor Liver Transplants

Living-donor liver transplant patients can receive a liver from a live donor long before their liver fails. It has shorter wait time with evaluation and surgery that can be scheduled ahead, plus many advantages to consider with a living-donor liver transplant.

The Mayo-Clinic reports the advantage of living donor liver transplant means the recipients often have better short-term survival rates. But comparing long-term results is difficult because people who receive a living donor liver usually have a shorter wait for a transplant and aren't as sick as those who receive a deceased donor liver.

Requirements of Living Donor Liver Transplants

The Mayo-Clinic states, “Living-donors have to go through a series of medical and psychological evaluation at a transplant center. Separate transplant teams will care for the donor and recipient during the evaluation process and will discuss the potential benefits and risks of the procedure in detail.”

Living donors are normally younger, healthy adults whose weight, and blood type, and organ size are compatible with the patient. There are additional risks and considerations the transplant team will evaluate and discuss with both the living donor and recipient.

The American Society of Transplant for Living Liver Donation states these requirements for living donors:

- Be at least 18 years old. Most donors are under 60 years old.
- Be in good health with no major medical or mental illness.
- Be a non-smoker for at least 4 to 6 weeks prior to surgery.
- Be able to understand and follow instructions before and after surgery.
- Have a compatible blood type.
- Have a similar body size.
- Be able to go through certain medical tests like blood work, radiology studies, and possibly a liver biopsy.

Recovery from Surgery

Recovery time can differ with each patient. General recovery time from surgery can take 4 weeks to several months. The donor usually can return to work within 8 to 10 weeks if recovery goes well. Continued blood tests and additional testing will continue for a while in recovery to monitor liver function for the donor as well as the recipient.

If you are interested in a living-donor liver transplant as a donor or recipient talk to your physician and discuss the risks and advantages for your condition.

For more information about becoming a donor: https://www.donatelife.net/

Have you discussed your liver condition with your physician? Are you in need of a transplant? Do you have a question or comment regarding liver transplant (living-donor or tradition)?

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