



A Brief Note on Heart Transplantation

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DESCRIPTION

A heart transplant is a surgical procedure that removes a person's diseased heart and replaces it with a healthy heart from an organ donor. To get rid of the donor's heart, two or more healthcare providers must declare the donor's brain death.

Before being placed on the waiting list for heart transplants, healthcare providers determine that this is the best treatment option for heart failure. The healthcare team also ensures healthy enough to go through the transplant process.

Heart transplants are done when other treatments for heart problems are ineffective and cause heart failure. In adults, heart failure can have the following causes:

- Myocardial weakness (cardiomyopathy)
- Coronary heart disease
- Valvular heart disease
- Congenital heart disease
- Dangerous recurrent abnormal cardiac rhythm (ventricular arrhythmia) that cannot be controlled by other treatments
- Previous heart transplant failure

In children, heart failure is most often caused by congenital heart disease or cardiomyopathy.

A heart transplant is not a right choice for everyone; some conditions which may not be suitable for heart transplant are as follows

- Elderly people who have impaired ability to recover from transplant surgery
- Regardless of receiving a donor heart, other medical conditions such as serious kidney, liver or lung disease that could shorten life span.
- Not willing to make necessary changes in lifestyle to keep donor heart healthy, such as to avoid drinking alcohol, smoking, etc.

Risks of a heart transplant may include

- Donor heart rejection is one of the major risks after a heart transplant is that body rejects the donor's heart.

- Primary graft failure is the most common cause of death in the first few months after a transplant, and the donor's heart does not function.

- Arterial problems i.e., after transplantation, the arterial wall of the heart thickens and hardens, which can cause cardiac allograft vasculopathy. This makes it difficult for blood to flow into the heart and can cause heart attacks, heart failure, arrhythmias, and sudden cardiac death.

- Side effects of the drug like Immunosuppressants that have to take for the rest of the life can cause serious kidney damage and other problems.

- Immunosuppressants can also increase the risk of cancer. Taking these medications may increase risk of skin cancer, lip cancer, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, among other illnesses.

- Immunosuppressants reduce the ability to fight infection. Many heart transplant recipients suffer from infections that require hospitalization for the first year after transplantation.

The transplant evaluation process includes the following steps

1. Psychological and social evaluation
2. Blood tests
3. Diagnostic tests
4. Other preparations

Another organ transplant may be performed at the same time as a heart transplant (multi organ transplant) in people with certain conditions at select medical centers. Multi organ transplants include:

- Heart-kidney transplant- This procedure may be an option for some people with kidney failure in addition to heart failure.
- Heart-liver transplant- This procedure may be an option for people with certain liver and heart conditions.
- Heart-lung transplant- Rarely, doctors may suggest this procedure for some people with severe lung and heart diseases if the conditions cannot be treated with only a heart transplant or a lung transplant.

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