

# Taking Medications after an Organ Transplant

You will have learned a lot about your medications while in the hospital. This sheet is meant to summarize important points about taking your medications.

You are taking medications to help keep your transplanted organ working well and to keep you healthy. When you take all your medications as directed, you give yourself the best chance of having a healthy transplanted organ for a long time.

## Taking medicines, vitamins, or herbal supplements

Always check with the transplant team before taking any new medications, any medicines you can buy without a prescription, vitamins, natural health or herbal products. Some of these products can change how your transplant medications work or cause side effects.

## Tips for taking medications

- ✓ Take your medications **on time, at the same time, every day.**
- ✓ Report side effects.
- ✓ Never change how much you are taking or stop taking a medication on your own.
- ✓ Follow the guidelines for when you accidentally miss a dose.

Always do your blood tests and keep your Transplant Clinic appointments.

## Know your medications

By now you should know about each of your medications. Yet, we know it is hard to remember everything. Also, we might adjust and change medications depending on your health and how well your transplanted organ is working.

It is good to ask yourself these questions often:

- ☐ Do I know the brand name and generic name of each medication?
- ☐ Do I know why I am taking each medication?
- ☐ Do I know what each of my medications looks like?
- ☐ Do I know when to take each medication?
- ☐ Do I know how to take each medication?
- ☐ Do I know how long I am to take each medication?
- ☐ Do I know the common side effects of each medication?
- ☐ Do I know what to do if I have any side effects?
- ☐ Do I know which medications have special instructions such as taking on an empty stomach or taking with food?
- ☐ Do I know what to do if I am late taking a dose, miss a dose, or forget to take a dose?
- ☐ Do I know how and when to re-order my medications?

If you answered 'no' to any of these questions, ask us to review your medication during your next Transplant Clinic appointment.

### Your anti-rejection medications

#### What they are for

Anti-rejection or transplant medications:

- Suppress your body's immune system, but hopefully not to the point where your body cannot fight off an infection.
- Prevent transplant rejection.

#### Why take them

Your body's immune system defends against foreign invaders such as germs and diseases. Unfortunately, your body cannot tell the difference between foreign invaders that can harm you (like an infection) and those there to help (like your transplanted organ). Your body will try to destroy or reject your transplanted organ unless you take your anti-rejection medications.

You must take these medications for the rest of your life. They help your body accept the transplanted kidney.

#### How they work

Each anti-rejection medication works a little differently. Some block your body from making the cells that help defend your body (white blood cells). Some interfere with how white blood cells work. Others reduce inflammation.

You might need to take more than one type of anti-rejection medication. We change these medications depending on your health and how your transplanted organ is working.

**Note - Never eat grapefruit, pomegranate, pomelo, or their juices.** These fruits and their juices can change how anti-rejection medications work.

#### How we know you have the right amount

The amount of medicine in your body at any one time varies. Many things can change how your body uses the medications such as if you take a medication with or without food.

One of the best ways to know how your body is responding to the medications is to do regular blood tests. Depending on the medication, we can usually tell if a medication is the right dose for you. Not all anti-rejection medications need blood tests.

Some medications have special instructions as to when to get the blood test. Here are a few examples:

If you are taking...	Your blood test must be...
Cyclosporine	<b>2 hours after</b> taking a scheduled dose
Tacrolimus	<b>1 hour before</b> taking a scheduled dose
Sirolimus	<b>1 hour before</b> taking a scheduled dose

At first, we check your blood often. As you improve, you should not need blood tests as often.

For more information on your anti-rejection medications, read the information sheet for that medication.

#### For women

Use birth control. You should not take certain anti-rejection medications if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Any pregnancy must be planned long before you get pregnant. Talk to the transplant team if you want to get pregnant.