



## Improving health for long-term survivors of cancer and transplants

By the year 2020, there will be as many as 18 million cancer survivors in the United States. Most will have lived five years or more after their cancer diagnosis. **Bone marrow or stem cell transplant survivors should actively protect their health. This can help speed up their recovery and improve the quality of their life. It can also lower their risk of developing health problems in later years.**

A few steps transplant survivors can take to protect and improve their health include:

- Getting regular exercise;
- Losing weight;
- Quitting smoking;
- Drinking less alcohol.

**Transplant survivors and health care providers need information and education about how healthy lifestyle choices can help survivors enjoy longer, healthier lives.**

Patients who have had a bone marrow, cord blood or peripheral blood stem cell<sup>1</sup> transplant have had complicated, often painful treatments. Both the cancer and its treatment may put their health at risk for years. They may be prone to new cancers and not know it. The most common complication after an allogeneic<sup>2</sup> transplant is graft-versus-host-disease, which can create its own long-term health problems.

This study compared lifestyles of long-term transplant survivors with the general population. It found that even though transplant survivors have more contact with health care providers, their preventive health practices were not much different than those who didn't have cancer.

The survivors in the study tended to drink less alcohol than the general population. But there was no difference between survivors and the general population in tobacco use. Survivors were less likely to get a Pap smear to check for cervical cancer. Flu shots are very important for transplant survivors, yet only 60% of those in the study had gotten one the year before.

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<sup>1</sup> Peripheral blood stem cells are cells that can change into different types of cell. To collect enough stem cells for a transplant, medication is given to the donor. This causes the stem cells to leave the bone marrow and enter the blood to be collected more easily.

<sup>2</sup> Allogeneic transplants are those where the patient receives bone marrow or peripheral blood stem cells from a relative or an unrelated donor (rather than donated from the patient himself, which is called an autologous transplant).

Survivors also got less exercise than the non-transplant group – as many as 75% of them didn't exercise as much as their doctors recommended. The number of people who were overweight was similar between the two groups. ***Being inactive or overweight can cause more health problems in cancer survivors than in the general population.***

Cancer specialists understand that transplant survivors need special kinds of health care, but general practice doctors and nurses may not know this. Current post-cancer treatments, health care advice, and preventive care for cancer survivors are not enough. Patients need transition care plans and better education, starting at the time they are diagnosed with cancer. General health care providers need more education about this issue as well.

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Source: **The preventive health behaviors of long-term survivors of cancer and hematopoietic stem cell transplantation compared to matched controls**, by Bishop MM, Lee SJ, Beaumont JL, Andrykowski MA, Rizzo JD, Sobocinski KA, Wingard JR. Published in *Biology of Blood and Marrow Transplantation*, Feb;16(2):207-214, 2010. Published online Sept. 23, 2009.