

UPMC Heart Transplant Program



Q: I would like to know if I can be listed for a heart transplant at UPMC. What do I need to do to get the process started?

A: Your doctor can refer you to the UPMC Heart Transplant Program, or you may refer yourself. Visit <https://www.upmc.com/services/transplant/heart/contact> to make an appointment for a heart transplant evaluation or refer a patient to the UPMC Heart Transplant Program.

Q: Will my insurance cover the cost of a heart transplant?

A: Every insurance plan is different. Your transplant credit analyst and social worker at UPMC will work with you and help you understand what parts of your medical care will be covered.

Q: I don't have insurance. How much does a heart transplant cost?

A: The cost of a heart transplant can vary from patient to patient, depending on multiple factors. If a potential candidate wishes to discuss estimated cost, he or she will be given contact information for patient business services, and a transplant credit analyst.

Q: Am I too old for a heart transplant?

A: UPMC does not have an upper age limit for heart transplant. We think about the risks and benefits for each patient separately. All patients are considered on a case by case basis and age is one of many factors.

Q: I quit smoking but I am still using e-cigarettes (or some other nicotine replacement product). Is that OK? How long do I need to be nicotine free before I can get an evaluation? Before I can get listed?

A: To be scheduled for heart transplant evaluation, a candidate must be nicotine-free for a minimum of four months. This includes all forms of nicotine: cigarettes, cigars, smokeless tobacco, e-cigarettes, nicotine patches, gum, or any other form of pharmaceutical nicotine. A candidate must be nicotine free for six months to be placed on the waiting list for heart transplantation.

Q: I had a heart transplant evaluation at another center and was turned down. Would UPMC evaluate me for a heart transplant?

A: Our experts review the case of every patient who is referred to us. We will consider you for heart transplantation even if you have been previously turned down at a different center. UPMC can often use the results from testing done at other medical centers, but requires that you are seen by our physicians and the rest of our transplant team.

Q: What happens when I come for outpatient heart evaluation? What kinds of testing do I have to do?

A: The outpatient heart transplant evaluation takes about a week to complete. In addition to consultations with the transplant team, the evaluation may include a heart transplant education session and diagnostic testing. These tests provide comprehensive data for the transplant team to assess the functions of your heart, lungs, and other bodily systems to determine if you're a candidate for transplant.

Q: My spouse and adult children all have full time jobs. Can I come to the transplant evaluation by myself?

A: No. We require all candidates to be accompanied by a primary caregiver. The evaluation is physically demanding and it would be difficult for someone with heart disease to get from one appointment/test or location without assistance. It is also important for the primary caregiver to attend the pretransplant education session, to meet with the members of the transplant team and learn what to expect as a potential caregiver posttransplant. Being a caregiver is a big commitment, and the team will not advocate listing if a candidate does not have strong caregiver support.

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Q: If I get listed for a heart transplant, do I have to live in Pittsburgh?

A: We require our patients who are waiting for a heart transplant to be able to get to Pittsburgh within four hours. Many people drive, but some patients arrange private flights to Pittsburgh. Your social worker can give you more information about flights.

Q: How long are the waiting times if I get listed?

A: Waiting times are difficult to predict and highly variable, from a day to over a year. Some factors that affect your wait time for a heart include your health status, size, and blood type.

Q: What are the restrictions for heart transplant surgery?

A: Certain conditions that increase your risk for complications during and after surgery may restrict you from having a heart transplant. Examples include, active cancer or a history of cancer, vascular disease, or an inability to comply with a complex medical regimen.

Q: Once I get a transplant, how long is the hospital stay?

A: Most patients stay in the hospital for about 10-14 days after a heart transplant. Some patients need to stay longer.

Q: Do I have to live in Pittsburgh after the transplant? For how long?

A: We ask our patients to stay close to the hospital for a least a month after your heart transplant surgery, depending on your recovery. During this time, you must have a dedicated caregiver living with you at all times.

Q: How often do I have to come back to Pittsburgh and how many times?

A: For the first four weeks, you will come back once a week for biopsies. Then, if your recovery is going well, your appointments for the first year will follow this schedule:

- Every other week in month 2
- Once a month until 6 months
- Every other month until 12 months

Q: How long until I am able to drive after a heart transplant?

A: You will not be able to drive for about six weeks after heart transplant surgery. You will need to have a caregiver with you for the first few months to help you run errands.

Q: Who can be my heart transplant caregiver?

A: You will need to have a primary caregiver and a back-up caregiver to help you through the heart transplant process. Your caregiver can be your spouse, sibling, children, neighbors, or friends.

Q: How do I start the heart transplant process for my child?

A: To discuss the heart transplant process for your child, schedule an appointment or consultation with the Pediatric Heart and Lung Transplant Program at UPMC Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh at **412-692-5541**.

Q: What's the Difference Between Statuses on the Wait List?

A: The United Network for Organ Sharing (UNOS) assigns a status to each person on the heart transplant wait list.

Placement on the heart transplant waiting list will be accordance to specific criteria met for status levels I through 6:

1 - 3: Most often hospitalized in ICU to support their heart

4: This group is often at home but may need IV medications or VAD to support their heart

6: This group includes all others who are stable enough to remain home while they wait for a heart